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GREAT MUSICIANS

(Giving Biographical Sketches and Critical estimates of
15 of the Musical Luminaries of the Post-Tyagaraja Period)

By

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P R E F A C E

This book has been written at the suggestion of the Southern Languages Book Trust. Brief accounts of fifteen of the luminaries who dominated the world of South Indian music during the post-Tyagaraja period are given herein. In addition to biographical sketches, critical estimates of their contributions to Karnatic music either in the shape of compositions or in the direction of new techniques of play are given. The luminaries chosen, are representative of the four linguistic regions of South India and include Vocalists, Instrumentalists and Kathakas.

The anecdotes given in this book serve to throw further light on the career, character, ideals and greatness of each luminary. The intelligent manner in which each emerged out of musically intriguing situations, provides interesting reading. The anecdotes mentioned in this book have been obtained from authoritative sources. Some of them are found mentioned in the diaries of famous musicians. I have been able to verify the veracity of most of these anecdotes.

In music, there is no short cut to fame. One has to put in hard practice and attain the highest standards in performance. One should take note of the standards reached by the luminaries of the past before trying to scale the ladder of fame. It must be mentioned that the high level of appreciation of the audiences of the past is a factor that conduced towards high standards in performance.

My thanks are due to Srimati Rukmini Devi, President, Kalakshetra, Adyar, for having written a foreword to this book and to Mr. V. S. Vaidyanathan, grandson of Ramaswamy Sivan for having allowed me to reproduce the Sanad given to Ramaswamy Sivan, by Bhaskara Setupati of Ramnad. My thanks are also due to Sri Semmangudy Srinivasa Ayyar, Chief Producer, All India Radio, Madras, for having furnished me some valuable details concerning Tirukkodikaval Krishnayyar and to Messrs. R. Subramanian, (Grandson of Tirukkodikaval Krishnayyar), Lalgudi Jayaraman (Violinist) and the Perambur Sangita Sabha for allowing me to make blocks of valuable photographs in their possession.

22nd January 1959.

The Author.

FOREWORD

Music has played a great part in the life of the Indian people and has entered the hearts of all people by being the instrument through which religion and philosophy have pervaded this land. Whether in drama, dance or on the concert stage, in the home, in the temples, in the fields and in the lives of the peasant, the king or the householder, music gave richness to our civilization and culture. Without it there would have been an empty void. Gradually through unimaginative education which took our people away from our roots and through politics, the great music of India was fading away from the consciousness of our people. Yet great musicians carried on their traditions for which we must be grateful to the Indian rulers and other noblemen. In South India, this tradition has fortunately survived in a greater measure than anywhere else in the country because almost every child was taught the beautiful compositions of our great composers and this helped them to appreciate music. There has always been an audience in the South for good music which is growing day by day though unfortunately cheap songs (inspired by the cinema) have also become popular.

In the popularising and appreciation of our classical music, Prof. Sambamoorthy has played a great part and thousands of music teachers in schools, colleges and elsewhere owe their profession to him. His enthusiasm and knowledge have been the cause of many publications both by him and others. Till now these publications were all in Indian languages and there are many collections of the compositions

of great composers. Now as our Indian music, particularly Karnatic music, is being slowly appreciated in other parts of India as well as in the West, books are being written in the English language. This present book by Prof. Sambamoorthy entitled "Great Musicians" gives a short sketch of the lives of some of the outstanding musicians. It is easy and interesting to read and will be particularly enjoyed by students because it contains not only information about the music of these artists but also gives charming anecdotes which make them living and human and bring them nearer to us.

Adyar,
11th Feby. 1959. }

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Maha Vidyanatha Ayyar

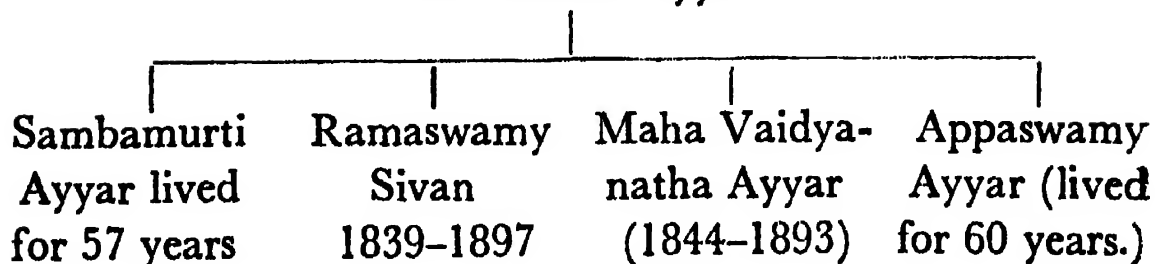
G R E A T M U S I C I A N S

Section I. Pioneer Singers

MAHA VAIDYANATHA AYYAR (1844—1893)

GENEOLOGY

Panchanada Ayyar



Illustrious composers have lived in India. But it is the happy lot of musicians to make the beauties of their compositions known to the public. Talented singers endowed with powers of interpretation have been able to make the audience get a glimpse of the *Vaggeyakara hrudaya*.

In a concert of South Indian music, *one listens to the music and the musician*. One listens to the music composed already by vaggeyakaras and rendered by the musician in an embellished manner and he also listens to the musician's own music extemporised on the spot and sung. The extempore music admits of the five branches—Alapana, Tana, Pallavi, Niraval and Svara. Whereas musical compositions present certain aspects of a raga in a rhythm c

form, manodharma sangita or creative music helps a musician to delineate in a comprehensive manner the various facets of the raga.

Amongst the brilliant *performers-cum-composers* of the post-Tyagaraja period, Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar occupies an honoured place. His life and achievements offer inspiring reading. His meteoric rise to fame very early in his life is something remarkable. In this connection, he may be compared to the Western composer, Mozart (1756-1791) whose precocious rise to fame became the envy of his contemporaries.

Early Life and Training

Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar was born in 1844 in the village Vaiyacheri, near Tanjore. He belonged to the Kaundinya gotra. He had his early training in music under Anayya, a composer of Kritis in Telugu and Tamil and later under Manambuchavadi Venkatasubbayyar, a direct disciple of Tyagaraja. Thus Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar belongs to the Sishya Parampara (line of disciples) of the great composer, Tyagaraja. His father was Panchanada Ayyar who was also a good singer.

Once Panchanada Ayyar happened to sing in a street bhajana in Tiruvaiyar, casually to the hearing of Tyagaraja. The great composer was attracted by his music. He walked from his house, came near him and blessed him saying that two sons who would make a mark in the realm of music would be born to him. True to his prediction, Ramaswamy Sivan and still later, Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar were born to him.

His Captivating Voice

Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar's voice was rich in harmonics. It had a charming ring in it. It had a wide compass of

three and half octaves extending from Anumandra Panchama to Atitara Shadja i.e. the compass of the modern Vina. An analysis of the tonal spectrum of his voice would have revealed many colour bands. He sang to the pitch of G (i.e., 5). The ringing and fascinating character of his voice, and his ability to sing in all the six degrees of speed charmed one and all beyond measure. His was a naturally gifted voice. It was not a cultivated voice. He sang continuously in his concerts and without a break. He sang at a stretch brigas comprising a range of $2\frac{1}{2}$ octaves with surprising rapidity and fluency and they gave one the impression of brilliant sparks of dazzling beauty witnessed in fireworks.

People who heard his concerts have with one voice proclaimed that his music was *gandharva ganam*. The elderly rasikas of the period exclaimed that after Tyagaraja (1767–1847), the one voice that reminded all of the sterling voice of the great composer of South India was that of Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar.

Before one could analyse the constituent notes of one sequence of his brigas, the singer would have already traversed through many more phrases. During his concerts, the audiences were virtually in a state of musical trance.

Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar took extraordinary care to preserve the metallic ring and responsive character of his voice. He rarely spoke. The queries of visitors who came to his house were answered by his elder brother or other inmates of the house. His voice was the *wealth of the family*. All the members of the family took extraordinary precautions to see that no occasion arose for him to talk in a loud or angry tone. The so-called disciples of Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar were only people who just heard his music and rendered some service in his house. They learnt music only

from his elder brother. Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar adhered to a restricted diet. He abhorred all pungent diet. On the days of his oil bath, he did not sing.

While in their teens, Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar and Ramaswami Sivan were invited by the Maharaja of Pudukottai to come and perform in the palace. The two boys sang remarkably well. The Maharaja was so pleased, that he specially decorated the two boys with luxurious costumes and presents. He had them seated in the Durbar carriage and had them taken in procession round the Mada Streets of Pudukottai to the accompaniment of music. The carriage was drawn by the horses belonging to the royal household.

His Repertoire

Since he started on his professional career early in his life, he had not the time to enrich his repertoire of classical compositions. In his concerts he sang only a few pieces but the bulk of the concert time was devoted by him to the rendering of Manodharma Sangita viz., Alapana, Tana, Pallavi, Niraval and Kalpana Swaras.

His repertoire included the following compositions :—

Vatapi Ganapatim - Hamsadhvani Raga.

Sri Subrahmanyaya Namaste - Kambhoji Raga.

Tyagarajaya Namaste - Begada Raga.

Najivadhara - Bilahari Raga.

Chintaya ma - Bhairavi Raga.

Kanjadalayadakshi - Kamalamanohari Raga.

Anandasagaramee - Garudadhvani.

The title 'Maha'

In the history of Indian music, he has the distinction of being the only luminary to be honoured with the title

‘Maha’ (great). This title was conferred upon him in 1856 when he was a lad of just twelve years of age by Subramaniya Desikar, the Pontiff of the Pandarasannidhi Mutt in Kallidaikurichi in Tirunelveli District. The title was conferred on the occasion of the Annual Guru Puja and before a learned assembly of vidwans which included musical stalwarts of the time like Periya Vaidyanatha Ayyar and Chinna Vaidyanatha Ayyar. The rising star in the realm of Karnatic music expounded the Chakravaka Raga on that occasion to the delight of the entire audience.

Professional Career

In his seventh year, Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar acquired the ability to sing raga alapana and pallavi. As a boy of ten, he began to give concerts along with his elder brother Ramaswamy Sivan.

He was a scholar in Sanskrit and Tamil and well versed in the science of Music and in the mysteries of Anahata nada. He was a composer and Harikatha Performer. Usually he was given two concert engagements. On the first day, he gave a vocal performance and on the second day, a Katha performance.

When a concert was over, the fee for the concert was received not by Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar but by his elder brother Ramaswamy Sivan.

He has given a record number of remunerative concerts during his life-time. Once he was invited to perform during a marriage in the house of one of the relatives of the late Mr. V. V. Srinivasa Iyengar, a retired Judge of the Madras High Court, in the year 1887. The marriage took place in Tiruchanur near Tirupati. Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar was requested to sing for six days in succession. This

is a record without a parallel. That a single musician was invited to give concerts for six consecutive days at the same place and before the same audience, testifies to the greatness and supreme charm of his music. The people did not want to hear any other concert during the marriage.

At another concert of his in Palghat, listeners were so fascinated with his rendering of the Kriti, *Vatapi Ganapatim* of Muthuswamy Dikshitar in Hamsadhvani raga, that they requested him to sing it again during the middle of the concert. Not satisfied, they again requested him to sing the piece before the close of the concert.

He was invited to perform by the Rulers of Mysore, Travancore, Cochin and Ramnad and special honours were bestowed upon him on those occasions. The historic concert given by him in Trivandrum during the reign of H. H. Ayilyam Tirunal and the magnificent honours bestowed upon him on the occasion are too wellknown.

He once expounded a Pallavi in Simhanandana tala. This tala is the longest of the 108 talas and it requires rhythmical gifts of a high order to handle a Pallavi in this complicated time-measure.

Patrons who heard Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar's concerts generally avoided listening to the concerts of others. When other Vidwans came to sing before them, they were given the customary fee of ten varagans (Rs. 35/-) and sent away with nice words. Thus these Vidwans got a fee without performing.

During the eighties of the last century, the Kumbabhishekam in Chidambaram temple took place. A large gathering of devotees and scholars had assembled on the occasion. It was morning time, when the great function was

scheduled to start. Mannargudi Raju Sastrigal, the veteran Sanskrit Scholar of the time was present at the function and he was requested to initiate the sacred rituals by singing a sloka. Raju Sastrigal in his turn requested Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar to sing a Sloka and the latter sang to the great joy of all. Being morning time, he followed the sloka with the singing of Tyagaraja's masterpiece in Bilahari Raga '*Najivadhara*'. The entire gathering that assembled, was thrilled with the divine music of Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar.

Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar had a reputation for singing *in extenso* even rare ragas like Kanakangi. Once in Merattur, just as he was about to commence a concert, Apasavya Arunachalayyar, a mischievous critic, who happened to be there, put him the cynical question 'Can you sing Rasikapriya raga?'. Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar took it up as a challenge and sang the raga for three hours, to the joy of all. At the conclusion of the alapana, it was Sandhyakala (twilight), and the master singer went away for his evening prayers. The questioner who had a beard and who was stroking it with his left hand at the commencement of the alapana, was so spellbound with the music that he continued to keep his left hand on the beard in the same posture right through the alapana.

It is of interest to note that in his concerts, the tambura was always kept in the horizontal posture and played and not in the vertical posture. To the right of Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar, sat his elder brother Ramaswamy Sivan. The tambura was kept in their front and the dandi rested on the laps of both the brothers. Ramaswamy Sivan twanged the tambura while his younger brother sang. Ramaswamy Sivan also accompanied him with his vocal music—but he

invariably hummed the tune in a low tone while the full-throated song (Dhatu-cum-Matu) emanated from the voice of his gifted brother. Sometimes when his brother halted at one stage of the alapana, Ramaswamy Sivan pursued the alapana to another stage. The thread was picked up later by Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar and the alapana concluded and finished.

His Personality

Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar had an attractive and a lustrous personality. He was fair-skinned and of medium height. He wore a Gourisankara Rudraksha Mala. His beaming and radiant face reflected his spiritual greatness. All felt that he was a Sivappazham (சிவப்பழம்). He was invariably addressed with the reverential appellation, *Sivanval* (சிவன்வாள்) and very rarely by his name. The nadopasaka easily impressed every one.

Once he was invited to go to Cochin and perform. That was his first visit to Cochin. He went to Trichur and went to the Vadakkanathaswamy temple to worship. It was festival time and the Maharaja of Cochin had come to Trichur. He also visited the temple at the same time. He had not seen Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar before. On looking at him, he immediately remarked to his Minister "That gentleman must be either a poet or a Sangita Vidwan." Immediately enquiries were made and it was found that the person was none else than Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar. When the Maharaja came to know of it, he felt extremely happy that the first meeting with that great musician took place in the temple itself. Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar gave his concerts in Cochin in the Royal presence and was profusely honoured.

His religious-mindedness

Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar was a religious-minded person. The great scholar and Vedantin, Kodaganallur Sundara Swamigal initiated him into Siva Bhakti and Siva Puja. Kodaganallur is a place near Shermadevi in Tirunelveli District. Sundara Swamigal was a Vadama Brahmin and a grahastha and he along with his wife lived in Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar's house and taught him higher philosophy.

At the conclusion of his Siva Puja every noon, Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar invariably sang a hymn from the *Tevaram*. To listen to that *Tevaram* at that time, hundreds of people used to congregate in the street and stand in the hot sun just to feast their ears with the Divine music though for a few minutes.

It was said that Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar was an upasaka of Uchchishta Ganapati (உச்சிஷ்ட கணபதி).

Just as he was punctilious about the Siva Puja, he was equally punctilious about the Sandhya Vandanam - evening prayers. He generally accepted concert engagements which either finished before evening time or commenced after sunset. But if evening concerts became inevitable, he invariably left the concert hall during sunset for about 15 minutes for performing the Sandhya Vandanam. At its conclusion, he returned back and resumed his concert. During his absence, one disciple of his continued playing the tambura. This is a point to be noted. The playing of the tambura without a break ensured the continuance of the musical atmosphere in the hall.

Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar once went to Tiruppanandal to fulfil a concert engagement. There he went to see the

birth-place of Chandesamara Nayanar. This Nayanar, a Brahmin, was one of the celebrated 63 Saiva Saints. On the way, the axle of the carriage in which he was travelling broke down. He bitterly wept. Spectators thought that he was weeping because of the bruises received as a result of the fall. But the fact was, he thought it was a punishment for him and that it was Providentially Ordained that he should make the journey to the place of pilgrimage on foot.

Tiruchchenganoor is the birth place of Chandesamara Nayanar and it is on the way to Kumbakonam from Tiruppanandal.

Musical Contest

Madras was the scene of the famous musical contest between Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar and Venu. It took place in the eighties of the last century. Venu was a powerful singer and an adept in the intricacies of the tala system like his master Photograph Masilamani Mudaliar.

Venu challenged Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar to come to Madras and face a contest with him. The eminent Vidvan from the south accepted the challenge. A day was fixed for the contest and Mr. Masilamani Mudaliar was chosen as the umpire. On the appointed day, crowds of musicians and music-lovers had gathered in the Tiruvannamalai Matam hall, Nattu Pilliar Koil Street, George Town (the place of contest), Madras. Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar came with Fiddle Venkoba Rao. At the time appointed for the contest, there was pindrop silence in the assembly. Venu had already prepared some very difficult pallavis, bristling with all types of intricacies in major ragas like Todi, Bhairavi, Kambhoji, Sankarabharanam and Kalyani. His plan was to forestall his opponent by giving him the option

of singing the raga first (thinking that he would after all attempt only major ragas) so that when his turn came he could easily stupefy him by releasing one of these prepared intricate pallavis in those ragas.

When the question was asked "Who is to begin the raga?" Venu straightaway suggested that Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar might begin. Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar without saying anything just prepared to sing *Sankarabharana*. But the shrewd Violinist Venkoba Rao read something in the suggestion of Venu and immediately pulling Vaidyanatha Ayyar at the back hinted to him to sing the raga *Narayana-gaula*. The hint was given in their private dialect so that the raga name was not understood by anyone. The singer took the clue and developed this raga. He sang and sang beautifully well. But Venu was dismayed for he was not able to identify the raga. When he was not able to identify the raga, how was he to set one of his previously prepared pallavis in that raga and confound his opponent? Eventually Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar was declared victorious. It was the intelligence and presence of mind of Venkoba Rao that saved his reputation.

His Contribution

His tillana *Gauri Nayaka* in Kanada Raga, Simhanandana tala is a brilliant composition. This is the only tillana in this tala. The entire composition consists of only two avartas—the first avarta containing the Sahitya in Sanskrit in praise of Nataraja and the second avarta consisting of beautiful jatis (rhythmical mnemonics).

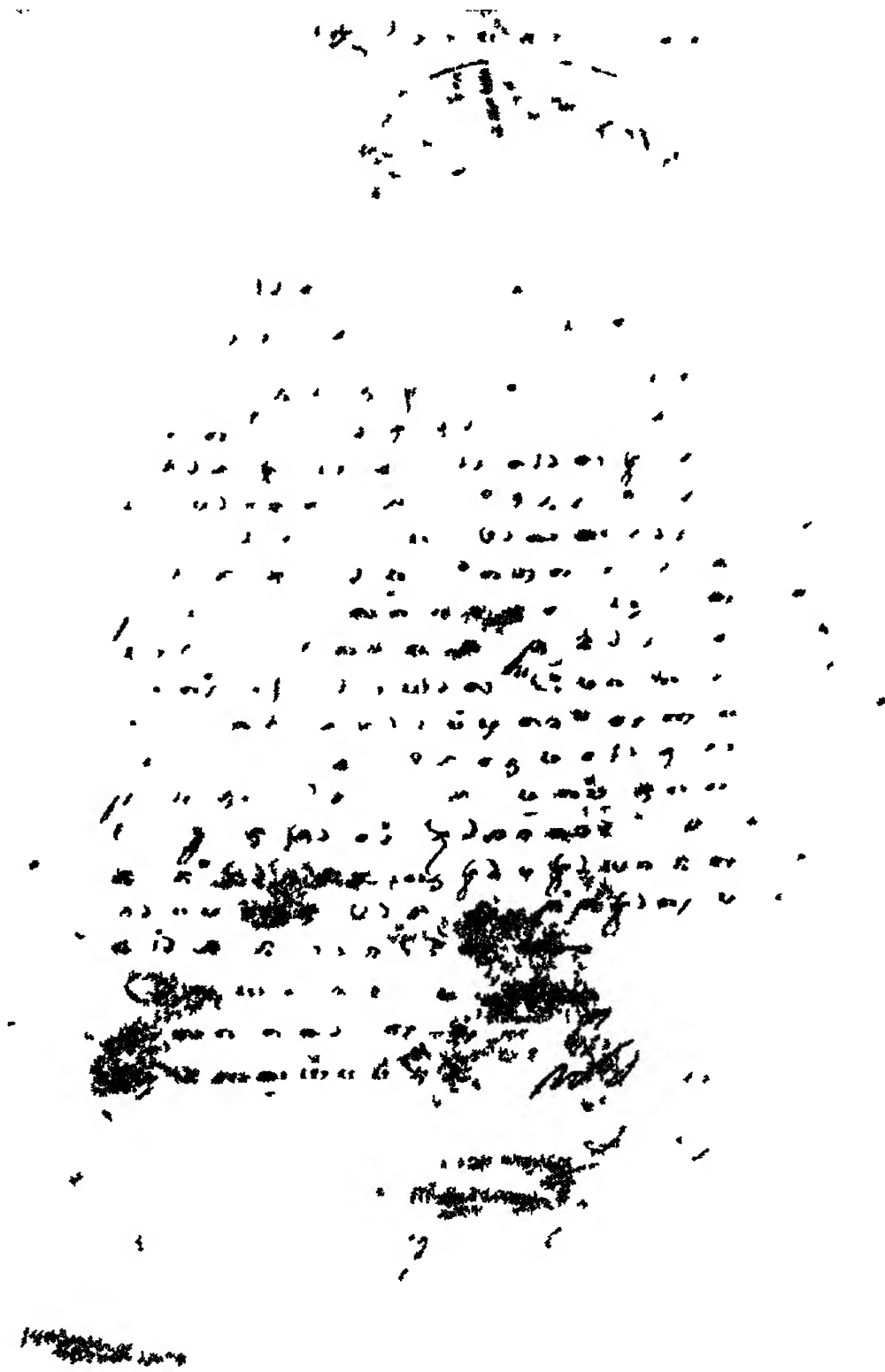
His varna *Pankajakshipai* in Kambhoji raga, Adi tala is a remarkable piece of high craftsmanship. The sparkling gems of Svaraksharas as well as the phrases in Sama yati and

Mridanga Yati invest it with remarkable beauty. His *Kriti*, *Pahiman Sri Raja Rajeswari* in *Janaranjani* raga in Sanskrit has a fine chitta svara. His Tamil songs, *Muthukumarayyane* in *Sankarabharana* raga and *Malmaruganai* in *Bilahari* raga have justly become famous.

The 72 *Melaragamalika*, the pride of Karnatic music and the longest single composition ranking along with *Ramaswamy Dikshitar's* masterpiece, the 108 *Ragatalamalika* was composed by *Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar* in 7 days, an achievement without a parallel in the sphere of musical composition. This composition is his *magnum opus* and has both a *lakshana* value and a *lakshya* value.

He adopted the signature “*Guhadasa*” in his compositions. It was he that added the now famous sangatis to the kritis, *Vatapi Ganapatim* (*Hamsadhvani* Raga), *Sri Subrahmanyaya Namaste* (*Kambhoji* Raga) and *Chintaya ma* (*Bhairavi* Raga) of *Muthuswamy Dikshitar*.

Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar and *Ramaswamy Sivan* were a happy combination. The latter was a scholar in Tamil. The biographies of the 63 Saivite Saints had been rendered into song and verse by them, and published under the title of *Periya Purana Kirtanas*. Whereas the *sahityas* emanated from the brains of *Ramaswamy Sivan*, they were set to apt music by *Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar*. Thus the saying “*Sangita Vaithi—Sahitya Ramaswamy*” came to stay in their family. On account of his extraordinary gifts in versification, *Ramaswamy Sivan* was honoured with the titles *Sahitya Puli* and *Monai Singam* (a veritable tiger in poetry and a lion in alliteration) by *Bhaskara Setupati*, *Rajah* of *Ramnad*.



Sanad Presented to Ramaswamy Sivan
by Vijayaragunatha Bhaskara Setupati

Anecdotes

The following anecdotes serve to throw light on certain aspects of Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar's life, career and character and the ideals held by him.

1. Both the brothers were very clever in the art of punning. Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar always wore a Rudraksha mala i.e. a garland of beads. Between the beads and separating them were round silver pieces. The Rajah of Ramnad decided to replace those silver rings with golden ones. Accordingly he got the Rudraksha mala from Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar. After replacing the silver pieces by gold pieces, he adorned the distinguished singer with the new Rudraksha mala at a special function in the Palace. The recipient humorously remarked "Velli villai tanga villai", (வெள்ளி வில்லை தங்கவில்லை) with a double meaning— (1) The Silver pieces have not stayed (2) Silver pieces (got replaced by) golden pieces.

2. Patnam Subrahmanya Ayyar and he were very good friends. Whenever there was an opportunity for Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar to listen to Patnam Subrahmanya Iyyar's concert, he did not miss it.

On the day of the Avani Avittam festival (in August), it is customary for Brahmins to be invested with new Sacred threads and begin Vedic studies. At the conclusion of the rituals on that day, it is the time-honoured practice for younger people to go to elderly people, prostrate before them and receive their blessings. On that day, every year Patnam Subrahmanya Ayyar who was younger than Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar by $1\frac{1}{2}$ years, used to go to Maha Vaidyanatha Iyyar's house, prostrate before him and get his blessings. The latter out of a feeling of modesty used to

exclaim “Sir, it is not right that such a great Vidwan like you should come and prostrate before me!”. Straight came the reply from Patnam Subramania Iyer “I want Sivanval’s blessings!”.

3. Tyagaraja’s grandson also named Tyagaraja, became a good singer. He once wanted to try his musical prowess with Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar. Manambuchavadi Venkata Subbayyar warned the grandson of Tyagaraja that it was dangerous to challenge Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar and that he would get virtually lost in the contest. (“அது நெருப்பு; சுட்டுவிடும்; அருகில் போகாதே” was the actual warning given by him). Not minding the warning of Manambuchavadi Venkata Subbayyar, the grandson of Tyagaraja met Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar in a musical contest and soon discovered to his dismay that he was nowhere before him.

4. During the days of Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar, the Sangita Sabhas with paying membership had not come into existence. The first regular Sangita Sabha with paying membership was established in Madras only in 1895. During the early nineties of the last century Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar was invited to perform in Triplicane, Madras. The organisers, without his knowledge, collected at the entrance money from those who came to attend the performance. Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar entered the concert place. He scented that money was being collected. He refused to sing that evening. He said that next day, he would sing in the Parthasarathy Swami temple freely and suggested that all can come and listen to his concert there. Accordingly the concert that evening was cancelled and the money collected was refunded. The next day thousands of people thronged to Parthasarathy Swamy temple and listened to his

divine music and were immersed in the ocean of aesthetic bliss.

5. Once he was honoured by the Raja of Ramnad with the present of a costly Rudrakshamala. On receipt of it, he decided within himself that he would make an offering of it to Sri Mahalingaswami, the presiding deity in Tiruvadamardur temple. His elder brother Ramaswami Sivan did not like the idea of parting with such a costly present. On this account, there was a misunderstanding between the two brothers and the two brothers did not even speak to each other for some time. Ultimately Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar had his way and he made the present of that mala to Mahalingaswami. He prevailed upon his own elder brother to give it as a gift to the Deity.

6. *Parasu Bhagavatar* was a disciple of Bikshandarkovil Subbarayar. At a certain marriage house in Palghat, Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar was invited to perform. A large crowd from the mofussil had come to Palghat to listen to his concert. The concert lasted for two hours. It served as an excellent treat and all people enjoyed it. The crowd from the mofussil did not disperse even after the concert was over. They stayed for the night. The hosts did not know what to do for them. Parasu Bhagavatar, a local musician was requested to sing. He agreed to sing on condition that the same vidwans that accompanied Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar i.e., Tirukkodikovil Krishnaier and Narayanaswami Appa should accompany him. The accompanists unwillingly got up on the dais. They were stunned at the music of Parasu Bhagavatar. Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar who was sleeping in an adjacent house, was captivated by the music. He could not contain himself; he sat up and listened to the music. But his elder brother Ramaswamy Sivan said.

‘Vaithi! Sleep’. Sleep”. But Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar the true artiste that he was, was so captivated by Parasu Bhagavatar’s music that he went to the concert place to listen. The local Bhagavatar felt honoured by the presence of Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar. The audience too felt thrilled at Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar’s presence there. The concert went on well. The Bhagavatar’s voice was excellent and he was in good form that night. Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar eulogised the talents of Parasu Bhagavatar.

7. Approximately 30 people ate in the house of Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar every day. The bulk of them were disciples who had come to learn music. They ate every morning ‘Pazhayadu’ (i.e., cooked rice soaked in water the previous night). Someone in the house grumbled that so many people were being fed and for nothing. Quick came the reply from him: “It is perhaps due to the good luck of somebody in this group, that we are all prosperous and living well. Let not this arrangement be disturbed.” Forthwith the murmurer was silenced.

His visit to Mysore

He was invited to go to Mysore and perform before the Maharajah. He was told by the Durbar officials that it was customary for all musicians to wear a coat and turban and sing in the royal presence. Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar never wore a coat or a shirt. He wore only a shawl over his body and he felt delicate about the wearing of a coat and turban. When his feelings were communicated to the Maharaja, the latter ordered a special gown of silk to be stitched for him for being worn the following day. He wore that gown and in the turban that was given to him for wearing, a special kalki saram was attached. In that way he

was honoured. He gave an excellent concert.

As he was singing the Kriti *Chintaya ma* in Bhairavi raga, the Maharaja without the knowledge of the singer, managed to record his music on Edison's Phonograph (i.e., on a waxy cylinder). After the concert was over, the music was played back to him. Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar was pleasantly surprised to listen to his own music recorded on the cylinder. It is a misfortune that this cylinder was destroyed during the fire in the Jagan Mohan palace some years ago.

His Visit to Travancore

He sang the raga Kharaharapriya in the court of Ayilyam Tirunal Maharaja of Travancore. This raga was not well-known at that time in Travancore and thus he created a tremendous impression.

Kalyana Krishna Bhagavatar, the famous Vainika of Travancore was very anxious to perform before Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar and get his approbation. Once he had the opportunity to do so. Although he was suffering from fever at that time, still he did not want to miss the opportunity of performing before Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar. He gave a splendid Veena performance that evening and Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar was very much impressed with his talent in Veena play and eulogised him.

On another occasion Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar and Kalyana Krishna Bhagavatar had the opportunity to perform before the Maharaja. Kalyana Krishna Bhagavatar with all his practice in fast tempo tried to reproduce all the phrases sung by Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar.

But in one or two places he failed to repeat those phrases on his instrument. The Maharaja immediately remarked "Kalyana Krishna! Don't be disheartened; after all yours is an instrument and your fingers had to move over the strings and frets repeatedly in order to produce the phrases. But Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar was easily able to negotiate those phrases because his was a voice."

In the historic contest that took place between Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar and Coimbatore Raghava Ayyar, both of them sang in all for 7 hours before an audience consisting of the Maharaja, Sangita Vidwans and the elite of Trivandrum. The Maharaja was equally impressed with the extraordinary skill, creative capacity and attainments of both the Vidvans. He was not able to decide as to who was the superior amongst the two. He ordered for presents of equal value to be brought and gave the presents simultaneously to both the musicians. He held the two plates containing the costly presents one in each hand and asked the two musicians to come and stand before him. He gave the presents which he had in his right hand to Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar and the presents which he had in his left hand to Coimbatore Raghava Ayyar. *The presents were given simultaneously.* Some court musicians asked him why he gave the presents that he had in his right hand to Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar. The Maharaja immediately remarked:—"Both are equally great. But still we must show courtesy and regard to the musician who had come from outside Travancore. For this reason I gave the presents that I had in the right hand to Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar and the presents that I had in the left hand to Coimbatore Raghava Ayyar. No other discrimination was sought to be made by me."

Anecdotes (*Continued*)

8. Once he was invited to perform in a marriage house in a place near Tiruvarur. Whenever he accepted mofussil engagements, one disciple always carried his Puja box which contained the idols which he worshipped. This time, the disciple that carried it was Subbiah i.e., Subbiah Bhagavatar of Kodaganallur. At the Tiruvarur junction, two trains came at the same time from opposite directions. Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar and his brother got into the second class compartment in the correct train and proceeded. Due to a stroke of misfortune, the disciple who had a third class ticket with him, got into the wrong train, instead of boarding the third class compartment of the same train in which the Vidvans travelled. Both the trains left the platform at the same time as per schedule. The musicians did not know that the disciple had got into the wrong train. When the musicians got down at the station where they had to disembark, they found to their dismay that the disciple had not travelled along with them. Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar was very much disheartened. He refused to have his bath and food for the day. The concert fixed for him that evening had to be cancelled at his express wish. In the mean time, the disciple who got into the wrong train discovered the mistake, got into the next available train and reached the place where Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar was camping, the same night. It is only after getting the Puja box that Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar had his bath, performed puja and had his meal. The concert that was cancelled took place the following day and all the people who were disappointed on the first day, were immersed in the ocean of celestial joy at listening to the divine music.

9. He was extraordinarily careful about the pitch in which he sang. The Mandara string of his Tambura was always kept steady at the particular pitch. Even before entering the concert hall, as his brother was walking along with him in the streets he used to call in a low musical tone, Ramaswami ! When the friend who accompanied him, once asked why he called his brother when he was actually following him, he said "I just called him in the Shadja sruti of my voice to make sure that my voice had the grasp of the correct tonic note."

It was the custom of Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar while in Tiruvaiyar to go every day to the different Sannidanas in the temple and sing one or two songs in praise of each Deity and return home. The last day of his mortal existence came. He breathed his last during the evening of that day. Evidently his soul, after shaking off the mortal coil, went to each one of the Sannidanas and had the darsana of the respective Deities before going on the heavenly path. So much so, that when people heard of his demise, everyone exclaimed, What ! 'I just now saw him in that Sannidanam, I just now saw him in this Sannidanam' and so on.

The Annual festival of Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar was celebrated for many years in Tiruvaiyar by his younger brother Appasamy Ayyar.



Patnam Subramanya Ayyar

2. PATNAM SUBRAHMANYA AYYAR (1845—1902)

Patnam Subrahmanya Ayyar, belongs to the Sishya parampara of Tyagaraja. He was a *Pallavi vidwan* and a composer of eminence. He belonged to the Ashtasahasram sect amongst Tamil Brahmins. His father was Bharatam Vaidyanatha Ayyar. His grand-father, Bharatam Panchanada Sastri was a *Samasthana vidwan* in the court of Serfoji Maharaja of Tanjore.

Patnam Subrahmanya Ayyar first learnt music under his uncle Melattur Ganapathi Sastrigal. Afterwards he mastered the art under the tutelege of *Manambuchavadi Venkatasubbayyar, a direct disciple and relative of Tyagaraja. He learnt the compositions of the Saint from him. As his voice was somewhat hard and unresponsive, he practised with great care and assiduity and brought it to a wonderful degree of perfection. Cultivated voices have a ring, volume and majesty of their own. He sang to *Sthayi sruti*. His voice had a long reach. He was one of those great vidvans who carried on vocal practices before sunrise, standing in neck-deep water.

He commenced his professional career when he was thirty. He got married in his thirty-second year. He came to Tiruvaiyar and settled there. His name and fame began

* Manambuchavadi Venkatasubbayyar has the distinction of having trained 5 luminaries in the world of Karnatic music : viz., Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar, Patnam Subrahmanya Ayyar, Sarabha Sastrigal, Tyagaraja, the grandson of the great composer, Tyagaraja and Fiddle Venkoba Rao. These five disciples are sometimes referred to as *Pancharatnas*.

to spread every where. Zamindars, kings and other rich people invited him to give concerts and honoured him.

His greatness as a Performer

In his renderings of Tyagaraja's kritis with *beauty* and *bhava*, he had no equal. His renderings of kritis like "*Darini telusukonti*" (Suddha saveri raga), *Nadaprasana* (Begada raga) and *Bavanuta* (Mohana raga) of Tyagaraja were characterised by beauty, verve, charm and grandeur. He had remarkable gifts at *improvisation*. He was able to sing elaborately even rare ragas. His delineations of ragas pointedly drew the attention of listeners to their lustrous beauty and sparkling features. His concerts were aural feasts. They gave abundant joy to one and all alike. Everybody was attracted by the *brigas* (phrases in quick tempo) which he rendered with unusual ease in the *tara sthayi*. His beautiful *ravai-jatis*, his tanas of variegated patterns and his kalpana svaras of rare originality left a deep impression on all those who heard his concerts. The very fact that Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar was fond of listening to his concerts is in itself a proof of the magnificent character of his music.

Specialisation in Begada

Patnam Subrahmanya Ayyar had an inimitable style of rendering the raga *Begada*. This deservedly got for him the title, *Begada Subrahmanya Ayyar*. Once he had an occasion to perform before the Royalty of Mysore. On the first day he sang Begada raga extensively, and on the second day he rendered tana in the same raga elaborately and followed it up with pallavi and kalpana svara on the third day. It was an unforgettable performance.

On another occasion, before the Mysore Royalty, at the request of *rasikas*, he sang elaborately the raga *Kannadagaula* and followed it up with a Pallavi. The Maharajah honoured him with Todas (golden bracelets) for both his hands. Many musicians opined that in his treatment of the raga *Poorna-chandrika* he displayed a remarkable originality.

He was also honoured by Maharaja Ananda Gajapati of Vijayanagaram. Mysore, Travancore, Vijayanagaram and Ramanathapuram Samasthanams used to send *Varushachalam* to him (*Varushachalam* denotes an amount sent as a mark of *reverential regard* to a Vidwan every year, even if he does not come to the samasthanam to perform on festive occasions like Dasara.)

Patnam Subrahmanya Ayyar was a great lakshana-lakshya vidvan. He was well-versed in the tala system of Karnataka music. He attained immortal fame by singing a Pallavi in Simhanandana tala. This is the longest of the 108 talas. This tala has got 32 *matras* or 128 *aksharakalas* for an avarta.

His genius as a composer

Later in his life, he composed *kritis*, *tana-varnas*, *pada-varnas*, *tillanas* and *javalis*. His kritis reflect the style of Saint Tyagaraja. He composed *kritis* in Telugu, Sanskrit and Tamil. The sangatis adorning his compositions are noteworthy. His humility is apparent from the fact that whenever he composed a new piece, he first sang it before vidvans. It was only after their approval that he taught them to his disciples. He was a past-master in the art of composing *chitta svaras*. Usually he sang only the kritis of Tyagaraja in his concerts. If anybody requested him to sing his own kritis, he sang one or two, towards the close of his concerts. He adopted the signature "*Venkatesvara*" in

his compositions. In some of his compositions he used the mudras: “*Varada Venkatesvara*”, “*Adi Venkatesa*”, “*Sri Venkatesa*” and also “*Sri Varada Venkatesvara*.”

Some examples are given below:—

<i>Mudras used</i>	<i>Name of the song</i>	<i>Its Raga</i>
Venkatesvara or Venkatesa	<i>Ninujuchi</i>	Saurashtra
	<i>Varamulosagi</i>	Keeravani
Sri Venkatesvara or Sri Venkatesa	<i>Inkadayaraleda</i>	Chakravakam
	<i>Sankalpamettido</i>	Kharaharapriya
Adi Venkatesa	<i>Paridana michchite</i>	Bilahari
	<i>Karuninchutaki</i>	Sindhumannari
Varada Venkatesvara	<i>Entanerchina</i>	Saveri
	<i>Varamiyyavayya</i>	Udayaravichandrika
Sri Varada Venkatesvara	<i>Manasuna nera</i>	Begada
	<i>Manasu karuga</i>	Hamsadhvani

His Contribution

He has composed about a hundred pieces, inclusive of tana varnas, pada varnas, kritis, javalis and tillanas. Most of them are in Telugu and a few in Sanskrit. He has composed many songs in Adi, Desadi, Rupaka, Chapu and Jhampa talas. Kritis like *Nipadamule* (Bhairavi raga), *Ninujuchi* (Saurashtra raga) and *Marivere dikkevarayya Rama* (Shanmukhapriya) are splendid compositions and stand as monuments to his creative genius.

Katanakutuhalam is a raga conceived by his genius. It is likely that he got the clue for this raga from the song in *Kutuhala* raga composed by his guru and beginning with the words 'Avarakuda'. Both the ragas are *janyas* of Dhira Sankarabharana mela. The arohana and avarohana of the two ragas are as follows :—

Kutuhalam—	$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{Arohana} - s\ r\ m\ n\ d\ p\ n\ \dot{s} \\ \text{Avarohana} - \dot{s}\ n\ d\ p\ m\ g\ r\ s \end{array} \right.$
Katanakutuhalam—	$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{Arohana} - s\ r\ m\ D\ n\ g\ p\ \dot{s} \\ \text{Avarohana} - \dot{s}\ n\ d\ p\ m\ g\ r\ s \end{array} \right.$

He gave life to this raga by composing his famous song *Raghuwamsasudhambudhi* which has an attractive tune.

Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar and Patnam Subrahmanya Ayyar were good friends. Both of them lived in Tiruvaiyar. The former lived in the street near the eastern gopuram of the *Pranatarthiharaswamy* temple and the latter in the street near the western gopuram. These two great vidvans used to participate in the bhajanas during the famous Sapta Sthana Utsavam. As Maha Vaidyanatha Sivan was 1½ years older than Patnam Subrahmanya Ayyar, the latter used to get the blessings of the former on the *Avani Avillam day* every year by prostrating before him.

Pallavi Exposition by the Trio

These two doyens of Karnatic music happened to go together to the *Pattabhishekam* (coronation) ceremony of Bhaskara Setupati of Ramanathapuram. Both of them and Kundrakkudi Krishna Ayyar gave music performances on the

occasion together. Kundrakkudi Krishna Ayyar had the capacity for singing even very difficult pallavis with great ease. He had the title “*Murukkumeesai Jigibigi Ghana Naya Desya Rattai Pallavi Krishna Ayyar.*” (முறுக்குமீசை ஜிகிபிகி கனநய தேச்ய ரட்டைப்பல்லவி கிருஷ்ணய்யர்). The marvelous effect of the concerts given together by the three gems of Karnatic music on that occasion could not be described in words. It was a feast for the Gods. Each of them gave of his best on the occasion. On that memorable occasion they sang the pallavi “*Setupati jaya jaya ravikula raja Vijaya Raghunatha Sri Bhaskara Sami*”, in Todi raga, Jhampa tala. It started on *Alita graha*, at $\frac{3}{4}$ count. At the end of the concert, Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar, as the senior-most musician, turning to Kundrakkudi Krishna Ayyar said, “The art of pallavi exposition is your *forte*”, and then to Patnam Subrahmanya Ayyar he said, “The art of embellished rendering of kritis is your *forte*.” Immediately without any hesitation Kundrakkudi Krishna Ayyar returned the compliment to Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar stating “In raga and svara (singing) there is none to equal you!” People heard these mutual praises and compliments with great rapture.

Patnam Subrahmanya Ayyar had a fascination for the style of singing of Coimbatore Raghava Ayyar. By strenuous practise he began to sing like the latter.

Pandidurai of Ramanathapuram was a great admirer of Patnam Subrahmanya Ayyar. He used to come to Tiruvaiyar often to listen to Ayyar's music. It was he who requested Patnam Subrahmanya Ayyar to teach music to Poochi Srinivasa Iyengar and made arrangements for the same.



Left to Right : Umayalpuram Gatam Narayana Ayyar, Ramnad Srinivasa Ayyangar
Patnam Subramanya Ayyar, Pandidurai Thevar (Zamindar of Palavanatham)
Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar, Mridangam Narayanaswami Appa, Valadi Radha-
krishna Avvar (Violinist)

His disciples

Patnam Subrahmanya Ayyar was a born teacher of music. He loved his disciples. He would teach them the art with infinite patience. If a *Sishya* failed to reproduce a particular phrase correctly in spite of repeated efforts, even then, without getting disgusted he would go on teaching the pupil until he reproduced it correctly. His methods of teaching were such that even dullheaded persons made progress under him.

It used to be said that sometimes, one or two disciples, anxious to listen to their master's music, purposely sang a phrase or two wrongly, although they knew the correct renderings. This had the desired result. Patnam Subrahmanya Ayyar was provoked and he not only corrected the wrong phrases but in order to impress upon the disciples, the significance and bhava of the musical composition as a whole he converted the rest of the teaching period into a concert by giving a brilliant exposition of the piece and its raga. The sishyas as well as the casual listeners who happened to be there at the time, considerably profited by this unexpected aural treat.

The following are some of his well-known disciples :—

1. Ramanathapuram Srinivasa Iyengar (Poochi Srinivasa Iyengar).
2. Kakinada C. S. Krishnaswamy Ayyar, the author of the Music books *Satakirtana Svaravali* and *Prathama siksha prakaranam*.
3. G. Narayanaswamy Ayyar (Tiruvadi).
4. Mysore Vasudevacharya.
5. Guruswamy Ayyar.
6. Tiger Varadachariar.

7. Muthialpet Sessa Ayyar of Madras (familiarily known as Kulla Sessa Ayyar).
8. M. S. Ramaswamy Ayyar.
9. Enadi Lakshmi Narayani (Enadi Sisters).
10. Daughters of Salem Minakshi (Pappa & Radha)

At the request of Salem Minakshi, Patnam Subrahmanya Ayyar came to Madras to teach music to her two daughters. He stayed in Madras for twelve years. On account of his long stay in Madras (Chennapatnam), people in the south called him *Patnam* Subrahmanya Ayyar, and this name came to stay for him ever since.

His brother-in-law Seshayyar used to accompany him on the Violin. The famous Violinist Tirukkodikkaval Krishna Ayyar also played for his concerts on several occasions. Dolak Nannumiya and Mridangam Tukaram have played for his concerts several times.

He was an Upasaka of Lord Ganapati. He used to perform the festival of *Vinayaka Chaturthi* with great eclat. As he had no children, he adopted his sister's grand-son. There is a saying "Death in *Kayilai* (Tiruvaiyar) means *Mukti* (Salvation)". He passed away in Tiruvaiyar on 31st July, 1902 (Dvadasi day of Krishnapaksha in the Tamil month *Adi*) in his 58th year. There is no doubt that his splendid compositions would continue to be sung for long.

After the demise of Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar, his brother Ramaswami Sivan published a pamphlet entitled "*Maha Vaidyanatha Vijaya Sangraham*". This contained eulogistic references to the great gayaka but it contained also some uncomplementary references to Patnam Subrahmanya Ayyar. This provoked a *Khandanam* i.e., a vehement rejoinder from Patnam Subrahmanya Ayyar. A counter

pamphlet *Mandanam* to this *Khandanam* was published by Mayavaram Vina Vaidyanatha Ayyar, a great admirer of Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar. These publications are a bit unfortunate. But as already pointed out, Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar and Patnam Subrahmanya Ayyar were very good friends and regarded each other with great esteem.

Anecdotes

1. Once, Madavala Muthiah Bhagavatar a great vidvan heard his concert and was so much enamoured of his music that after the concert was over, he walked to his residence carrying the lampstick in front of him. (In that village there were no street lights. Though servants would have carried the light in front of the Vidvan to show him the way, Madavala Muthiah Bhagavatar volunteered to carry the light himself out of reverence and admiration for the great Singer). After reaching the house, he watched Patnam Subrahmanya Ayyar as the latter rested lying on the cot. He was awe-inspired when he noticed the stomach of Patnam Subrahmanya Ayyar executing movements as if Tanam was being sung rapidly.

2. Once while in Madras, he was staying in the house of a friend in Triplicane. One morning he sat near a pillar in the hall of the house and carried on his *nabhi tana sadhakam* (நாபி தான ஸாதகம்). The pitch of his voice accidentally coincided with the frequency of the hall and the pillar and the floor began to vibrate in sympathy. The inmates of the house noticing this got frightened and requested the vidvan to stop practising. The intensity of his music was such that it excited the sympathetic vibration of the pillar and the floor.

3. Once he was requested to compose a kriti in Kalyani raga by his friends. He had already earned the enviable

title of *Chinna (small) Tyagaraja* by his kritis. When the request came, he said to them “Tyagaraja has already exhausted all the possible avenues in Kalyani. How can I compose any new kriti in that raga?” Anyway, he kept on thinking for over a year and at last composed his “*Nija dasa Varada*” in Kalyani raga, Adi tala without patently treading upon the tracks already covered by the saint of Tiruvaiyar.

3. KUNDRAKKUDI KRISHNAYYAR (1816—1889)

The latter half of the nineteenth century witnessed the brilliant trio in South Indian Music : Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar, Patnam Subramanya Ayyar and Kundrakkudi Krishnayyar. Both in point of musical learning and reputation, the last named was on a par with the other two.

Kundrakkudi Krishnayyar was born in 1816 in the village Kundrakkudi in Ramnad District. He attained proficiency in music early in his life. He was the Samasthana Vidvan of Ramnad for many years. He held this position with great dignity. He was profusely honoured by both Muddu Ramalinga Setupati (in whose praise he composed the famous *Varna, Kamalakshi ninne koriyunnadi* in Kambhoji raga—Jhampa tala) and Bhaskara Setupati. In praise of the latter he has composed a number of Chauka varnas. His pada varna in Sankarabharana raga *Samiki sari yevvare* in Adi tala has become a classic.

His powers at exposition of Pallavis

He once gave a superb alapana of Huseni raga and followed it up with a fascinating pallavi in Chapu tala. He had a fondness for composing pallavis in rare talas. He used to challenge vidvans and ask them to handle the pallavis in intricate talas composed by him. This habit of springing surprises on vidvans by throwing pallavis set in perplexing eduppus and in inconvenient tempos was noticed in the case of a few later musicians like Tiruvaiyar Subramanya Ayyar. Complex pallavis with dexterously

embroidered patterns of rhythmical designs have been occasionally used as powerful weapons by some Vidvans to humiliate swollen-headed accompanists and turbulent drummers.

Once in Ramnad, an assembly of Sangita Vidvans was convened. On that occasion, Kundrakkudi Krishnayyar took Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar unawares by singing a pallavi set in 64 kalais, and asked him to respond. The pallavi was literally inflated with words. Krishnayyar himself must have taken a lot of time to compose it and master it himself. Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar mildly said, "Please repeat the Sahitya once again". "Why the necessity for repeating the Sahitya of this simple pallavi?", ejaculated Krishnayyar. Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar smilingly retorted, "If your composition was a pallavi according to the accepted canons, the necessity to request you to repeat the sahitya would not have arisen. But the sahitya of your pallavi is just a Kattalai Kalitturai-கட்டளை கவித்துறை (a type of Tamil verse). (Pallavi, being an art-form, should have in it a minimum number of words or at best an equitable number of words and the words should be in consonance with its musical setting. If a pallavi has too many words, the scope for niraval naturally becomes narrowed down and it tends to become a musical curiosity in spite of its intricate rhythmic construction).

It was Krishnayyar's pastime to drag even eminent musicians into contests and land them in awkward situations. As already mentioned on page 26, Krishnayyar was called "... Jigibigi... Rattaipallavi Krishnayyar (i. e., one who could handle with perfect ease even terse and hard pallavis. (Rattaipallavi is just two separate pallavis, but melodically knit to constitute a single unit. Examples of Rattaipallavis are rare and singers of them are rarer still.)

Kundrakkudi Krishnayyar's name has gone down to musical history as the first person to suggest the possibility of composing a pallavi after the ragamalika pattern. A pallavi wherein its sections, two or four, can be set in different ragas. A well-known example is the pallavi: *Sankarabharananai azhaittodi vadi, Kalyani! Darbarukku* (சங்கரா பரணனை அழைத்தோடி வாடி! கல்யாணி! தர்பாருக்கு) wherein the names of the four ragas, Sankarabharana, Todi, Kalyani and Darbar, are skilfully interwoven with the text of the sahitya to give an intelligent meaning. Thus this is a Ragamalika pallavi with the raga mudras incorporated in the sahitya.

Kundrakkudi Krishnayyar had a rich bass voice like that of Patnam Subrahmanya Ayyar and also sang like him with sthayi sruti.

Krishnayyar was a svanama mudrakara. Some of his compositions contain good chitta swaras.

The following are some of the wellknown compositions of Kundrakkudi Krishnayyar.

Type	Name of the Piece	Raga	Tala
Tana Varna	<i>Kamalakshi</i>	Kambhoji	Jhampa
Pada Varna	<i>Samiki sari</i>	Sankara-	
		bharana	Adi
Pada jati varna	<i>Ento vaibhavamu</i>	Kedaram	Adi
Kriti	<i>Sri Parvati</i>	Sriraga	Ata
„	<i>Bhakti margame</i>	Sarasangi	Adi
„	<i>Nive nannu</i>	Kambhoji	Adi
„	<i>Jivineruga</i>	Mandari	Rupakam
<i>Kambaramayana Tillana</i>		Todi	Adi

(A verse from *Kamba Ramayana* figures as the Sahitya of the charana of this tillana and hence the name).

Of the brilliant musicians that lived in Kundrakkudi time may be mentioned, Sabhapathi Bhagavatar, occasionally Ambi Bhagavatar and Rajam Bhagavatar.

Anecdote

Muddu Ramalinga Setupati and Krishnayyar were good friends. One evening both of them started on a long walk. They came near a well in a field. The Setupati sprang a surprise on the vidvan by saying "Well Krishnayyar, you must sit on the parapet wall of this well and compose a varna by the time I return back. I expect to return back in an hour. If you fail in the attempt, you will be pushed into the well". The suggestion of the Setupati though given in a sporting manner, was taken up by Krishnayyar seriously and he composed on the spot the now famous *Kamalakshi varna* in Kambhoji raga, Jhampa tala. His creative faculties functioned in top form. The musical setting as well as the sahitya of the composition are excellently couched. In the sahitya of the second ettugada svara, *Dani vinayamunu, Dani abhinayamu, Dani mata ghanamu, Dani mukha nayamu, Dani rati paniti*, the phrase *Dani*, occurring five times constitutes a fine example of figured svarakshara. In the sahitya of the last ettugada svara, there are fine antya prasas i.e., ending rhymes : Elara ! Chalamidelara, Elara, Devara.

Elara occurs as a yamakam. The first *Elara* means "Why this"? and the second *Elara* means "Take her".

The hurried manner in which this varna has been composed is revealed by the fact that the sahitya of the second avarta of the anupallavi suffers from a prosodical error. It has neither the yati nor the prasa yati.



Parameswara Bhagavata

4. PARAMESWARA BHAGAVATAR

(1815—1892)

He was born in 1815 in the village Noorani, in Palghat. He was a Tamil Brahmin and belonged to the Braha-charanam sect. He lost his parents when quite young. He was brought up with great care by his uncle in Guruvayur. Endowed with a fine, sweet, melodious and ringing voice, his juvenile performances in the Temple at Guruvayur, attracted a lot of attention. He came into contact with a number of eminent musicians who visited Guruvayur on pilgrimage. When he was barely 16 years of age, he had acquired a sound knowledge of the theory and practice of music. He also acquired the ability to compose in Sanskrit and Malayalam.

His coming to Trivandrum

During his 18th year, he went to Trivandrum to attend the festival in the temple of Sri Padmanabhaswami. He sang in the temple one day. The young prince Swati Tirunal, who had ascended the throne just four years back, was captivated by the music of Parameswara Bhagavatar. He straightaway appointed him Samasthana Vidvan and promoted him later as the Chief samasthana vidvan. He was the first musician from outside Travancore to be appointed Chief samasthana vidvan.

Parameswara Bhagavatar was a man of piety and sound learning and possessed an excellent character. These qualities of his, coupled with his musical greatness endeared themselves unto the Ruler and the two became very intimate

friends. He was younger than the Maharajah by two years. He helped the Maharaja by contributing the dhatu to some of his sahityas. He learnt the finalised compositions and taught them to the other palace vidvans and in that manner contributed to their being known and learnt by hundreds of people. Parameswara Bhagavatar rose high in the estimation of all musicians by sheer dint of his merit. He was an adept in developing tanas and in the exposition of pallavis—the two difficult branches of manodharma sangita. When Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar shot into fame and visited Trivandrum, he alone was recognised as the only formidable rival to Parameswara Bhagavatar.

During festivals and in entertainments given by the Maharaja of Travancore, Parameswara Bhagavatar was given the prime place of honour. His performances were given precedence over those of others. Besides being a great gayaka, Parameswara Bhagavatar was also proficient in playing the Veena, Violin, and Swarabat. He was also a performer of Harikathas. He was punctilious about performing Siva puja every day. He retained the sweetness, ring and metallic character of his voice till his last days. He held the post of Chief samasthana vidvan with great dignity and during the reigns of four of Travancore's illustrious monarchs—Swati Tirunal (1829–1846), Uttiram Tirunal Martanda Varma (1847–1860), Ayilyam Tirunal (1860–1880) and Visakam Tirunal (1880–1885).

The *Utsava Prabandham*, composed by Swati Tirunal is in Manipravalam. It gives an account of the ten days' festival celebrated twice annually in the Padmanabhaswami Temple. It was composed in 1014 M. E. Parameswara Bhagavatar rendered this Prabhandam so finely that he was given special presents and honoured by the Maharajah.

Parameswara Bhagavatar and Swati Tirunal spent many hours in the composition of beautiful varnas and kritis. The Bhagavatar has by himself composed a number of Kritis and Varnas. His varnas are in the ragas, Nata, Gaula, Arabhi, Sriraga, Varali, Todi, Khamas, Yadukula-kambhoji, Sankarabharanam, Behag and Bilahari. His varna in Nata raga *Sarasija* shows his skill in design and craftsmanship.

To the well-known composition Pancharaga Svarajati of Swati Tirunal in Tripura Tala in the ragas, Kalyani, Begada, Atana, Surati and Todi, a fine Sanskrit Sahitya beginning with the words, *Sarasa bhava* has been added. It is possible that this sahitya is by Parameswara Bhagavatar. In the last section it is expressly mentioned that this Sahitya is given to the dhatu conceived by Swati Tirunal.

The Bhagavatar took to sanyasa asram in his last days and attained siddhi in the year 1892 in his 77th year.

His sons

Parameswara Bhagavatar's son was Mahadeva Bhagavatar, a reputed Violinist. He was also a composer and has to his credit some gitas, svarajatis, varnas, kritis, javalis, and nirupanams (story songs). The ragas figuring in his compositions include Vasanta, Darbar, Huseni, Hindusthani Kapi, Janjuti, Behag and Purvakalyani. Parameswara Bhagavatar's second son Ramakrishna Ayyar also became a good musician.

His disciples

Amongst the disciples of Parameswara Bhagavatar, Coimbatore Raghava Ayyar shone as a brilliant star in the firmament of Karnatic Music. He had a tristhayi sarira and

its compass extended from anumandra sthayi panchama to tarasthayi Panchama. He was a past-master in singing ghana, naya and desya.

Noorani Ayya Bhagavatar, Mukke Ganapati Bhagavatar, Kittu Bhagavatar, Appu Bhagavatar, Gopala Bhagavatar and Sitarama Bhagavatar were his other disciples. Kittu Bhagavatar was a talented performer on the Swarabat.

Anecdote

Parameswara Bhagavatar had a just estimate of the musical talents of his contemporaries. The following anecdote will bear this out.

Parameswara Bhagavatar had a great admiration for Vadivelu's music. Vadivelu (1810—1847) also was a Samasthanavidvan. Coimbatore Raghava Ayyar had often heard his guru speak to him in glowing terms about Vadivelu's music but never had a word of praise for his own music. One day Raghava Ayyar specially sang for four hours to the hearing of Parameswara Bhagavathar. He gave of his best that day. Parameswara Bhagavatar complimented him on his splendid performance. Not content with this praise, he asked his guru, "How does my performance compare with that of Vadivelu's?" Forthwith came the stinging reply: "அவனுக்கு விளக்கு எடுத்துக்கொண்டு போவதற்குக்கூட உனக்கு யோக்கியதை இல்லை", i.e., you are not fit even to carry the lampstick before him (Vadivelu).

It might be pointed out here that in those days it was the custom for servants to carry lamps in front of their masters whenever they had to walk along the streets during night time. In the case of men of letters and musicians, it was thought a privilege for any one to carry such lamps in their front.

5. PALLAVI SESHAYYAR (1846—1908)

Pallavi Seshayyar belongs to Tyagaraja's *Sishya parampara*. His father Neykkarappatti Subbayyar was a direct disciple of Tyagaraja. Neykkarappatti is a village in the Salem District. Pallavi Seshayyar was a Telugu Brahmin and belonged to the Muriginadu sect. To this sect belongs the great composer Tyagaraja. Pallavi Seshayyar was a lakshana-lakshya vidvan and a versatile composer.

Pallavi Seshayyar became proficient in music early in his life. He learnt Tyagaraja's compositions from his own father. He specialised in Pallavi singing. He was able to handle even intricate pallavis with ease. He was endowed with an extraordinary creative faculty. {He was able to expound even minor ragas for hours together. Once in the music festival conducted by Tiruvottiyur Tyagayyar in Madras he sang the Dhanyasi raga and a pallavi in it for 8 hours. On another occasion he sang the Gaulipantu raga for 3 hours. At another concert, he sang the raga Dvijavanti elaborately. The audiences on all those occasions consisted of sangita vidvans. These are glorious records and these achievements have passed into musical history. He had also the capacity to sing Kalpana jatis. After singing Kalpana svaras to the chosen theme, he used to delight his audiences by singing jatis extempore to the same theme.

His compositions

He has composed Kritis, Pada varnas and Tillanas. His Kritis are noted for their raga bhava and sahitya bhava:

His tillanas in Kanada, Kapi, Vasanta and Dhanyasi ragas are splendid compositions. All his compositions are in Telugu.

His compositions breathe the fragrance of bhakti. In his compositions there is a natural flow of music. Easy diction and sweet sounding words are a feature of his sahityas. The sangatis in his kritis succeed one another naturally. He is the first composer to compose a kriti in Mallikavasanta raga.

The Arohana and Avarohana of Mallikavasanta raga, a derivative of Mayamalavagaula is as follows :—

s g m p n \dot{s} — \dot{s} n d p m g r s

His compositions in Nadanamakriya, Bhairavi, Kiravani, Purna Shadjam, Gaurimanohari, Kedaragaula, Sama, Khamas, Kedaram, Garudadhvani, Suddha Saveri, Hindusthan Belag, Subhapantuvarali, Purvakalyani and Shanmukhapriya are as suggestive as they are interesting.

Pallavi Seshayyar was honoured in the Mysore samasthanam. One of his prominent disciples was the late Sangita Vidvan Manathattai Duraiswami Ayyar.

Pallavi Seshayyar has done yeoman service by rendering his compositions in notation. He has also left a Manuscript containing the arohana and avarohana of more than a thousand ragas. This Manuscript also contains brief notes on some of the ragas.

The circumstances attending the composition of his Tillana in Dhanyasi raga are interesting. Once he went to Mysore to sing in the Royal presence. He could not easily get an opportunity to do so. One Friday evening, he went up the Chamundi Hill and stood in front of the big Bull *en*

route. The Maharajah as usual went up the hill that afternoon. (In those days, there was no motor road to go up the hill. The Maharajah invariably ascended the hill through the pedestrian route.) At the spot in front of the Bull, he saw a scholarly person standing. From his appearance he concluded that he must either be a poet or a sangita vidvan. The Maharajah asked him who he was and what made him come and stand there all alone. Pallavi Seshayyar replied that he was a sangita vidvan and had come all the way to Mysore to sing in the Royal presence and that his attempts in that direction had not so far been successful. Forthwith the Maharajah invited him to come to the Palace the next day afternoon and issued orders to that effect to the Darbar Bakshi. Pallavi Seshayyar composed that night this Tillana in Dhanyasi raga. The sahitya at the commencement of the charana "*Bhumi velayu Somakulavara! Syama Bhupa! Seshuni manavini vini kamitarthamu losagi kavumika kalyana guna dhira udhara*" is self-explanatory. The Maharaja listened to the Dhanyasi tillana brought as a gift to him and appreciated the creative talents of the Vidvan. He heard his concert subsequently and bestowed upon him special honours.

The Kapi raga that Pallavi Seshayyar has pictured to us in his Tillana is the upanga type of Kapi raga taking the arohana and avarohana s r m p n ś — ś n d n p m G r s. It does not take the foreign notes, antara gandhara, suddha dhaivata and kakali nishada. *G m P* occurs as a visesha sanchara. Thus in the lakshya of Karnatic music, we have the three varieties of Kapi, firstly the pure Karnataka kapi immortalised by Kshetrajna in his Pada *Adaranamovi*, by Tyagaraja in *Chutamurare* (Nowka Charitram) and by Syama Sastri in the kriti *Akhilandesvari*.

Secondly the upanga type of Kapi which we see in Pallavi Seshayyar's tillana and in the kriti *Manamohana Syamala Rama*. Thirdly there is the bhashanga type of Kapi made familiar to us in Javalis like *Vaddani ne*. The bhashanga type of Kapi is also known by the names, Hindusthani Kapi, Desya Kapi and Misra Kapi. Tyagaraja did not compose in Hindusthani Kapi but only in Karnataka Kapi. His Kritis, *Inta saukhyamani* and *Mivalla guna dosha* were composed in Karnataka kapi raga. The tunes in Hindusthani Kapi in which these two kritis are now sung are forged tunes and are of recent origin.

Pallavi Seshayyar was an inspired composer. There were occasions when during the dead of night, new compositions flashed across his mind. He immediately woke up his disciple Manathattai Duraiswami Ayyar and dictated to him the Svara and Sahitya of the new kritis.

Pallavi Seshayyar is a Svanama mudrakara. Some of his well-known and frequently sung kritis are:—

<i>Name of the Piece</i>	<i>Raga</i>	<i>Tala</i>
<i>Ikanannu brovakunna</i>	Bhairavi	Adi
<i>Enta pilachina</i>	Kedaragaula	„
<i>Sarananu narulanu</i>	Sama	„
<i>Nive na jivamani</i>	Kedaram	Rupakam
<i>Na punyamettido gana</i>	Subha pantuvarali	„
<i>Maruva niku</i>	Purvakalyani	Adi

His tillanas in Kapi and Vasanta ragas are also frequently sung.



Ramand Srinivasa Ayyangar

6. RAMNAD SRINIVASA IYANGAR

(1860—1919)

Ramnad Srinivasa Iyengar (Poochchi Iyengar), was born in Ramnad on Thursday the 16th August, 1860 (2nd Avani). His father was Narayana Ayyangar and his mother Lakshmi Ammal. He enjoyed universal fame as a Vidwan of outstanding eminence.

His tutelage

He studied in the High school at Ramnad and passed the Matriculation Examination. Pandidurai of Ramnad, the well-known patron of music of the time, recognised the sweetness and richness of the voice of young Srinivasa. Thinking that if given proper training in music, he would, in the fulness of time, become a luminary in the realm of music, he entrusted him to Patnam Subrahmanya Ayyar (1845–1902), who in those days visited the Ramnad Palace frequently to give concerts. Pandidurai was a great devotee of Siva and was steeped in musical learning. He was the President of the Tamil Sangam of Madurai at that time. He could quickly discern the musical worth in rising musicians. It was he who was primarily responsible for ushering Ramnad Srinivasa Iyengar into the world of music.

The young disciple had a reverential regard for his Acharya, Patnam Subrahmanya Ayyar. With his un-bounded enthusiasm for music, he soon made excellent progress in the art. Poochi Iyengar sang along with his Guru during the latter's concerts. He well realised that but for the personal

interest and love bestowed upon him by his Guru, he could not have attained that eminence in the domain of music.

Srinivasa Ayyangar was fair-complexioned, well built and of average height.

After the period of his tutelage, Srinivasa Iyengar spent some years in listening to the concerts of eminent singers of the time like Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar (1844–1893). He realised the truth of the dictum that in musical studies, what one actually learnt from his Guru was just a fourth, and that the remainder was acquired by listening to the concerts of senior musicians. By systematic practice, he brought his voice to a wonderful degree of perfection. He established himself as a singer of front rank within a short time. His name and fame quickly spread to the other parts of the country. He received invitations to sing in a number of places. Wherever he went he was the recipient of encomiums and presents. He was appointed samasthana vidvan of Ramnad.

His Performances

During the early period of his professional career he sang to the pitch of $4\frac{1}{2}$. Later on, he sang to the pitch of 3. He had a rich and melodious voice. His concerts were scholarly and at the same time entertaining. He realised the beauty of madhyamakala ganam. His singing was effortless. Not the least sign of strain was noticeable in his face during his concert. He always sang with a smile on his face. He truly enjoyed the music sung by him. He was able to negotiate with perfect ease, Kritis, Pallavis and Alapanas in different tempos. The lustrous notes that emanated from his voice had the brilliance of crystalline beads. His Brigas (phrases in quick time) were characterised by naturalness and easy flow. He adhered to the Sthayi

sruti. Of the twin factors in music, melody and rhythm, he gave prominence to the former. He did not cherish the idea of accompaniments taking a lot of the concert time to display their individual talents. Many a time, he was found to give a solo chance to the mridangam player, only towards the fag end of his concerts. Even with average accompaniments he made his concerts attractive and enjoyable. His extensive repertoire included the compositions of Sri Tyagaraja, Patnam Subrahmanya Ayyar and older composers and also many varnas, padas and javalis. It is this wide knowledge of varied compositions that enabled him to develop a captivating style of singing.

Whenever he heard a new kriti sung by some one, he would without the least pride straightaway go to him and learn it from him by rendering it into notation.

A person of genial temperament he took special interest in the uplift of junior musicians. Whenever junior accompanists were engaged to accompany him, he invariably encouraged them. They in their turn gave of their best.

His Compositions

Like his Guru, he has also composed kritis, varnas, javalis and tillanas and has succeeded remarkably in his attempts. His Varna in Varali raga and his Tillana in Lakshmishta tala (one of the 108 talas) are noteworthy compositions. One can now hear the polished and stylish renderings of his compositions by many vidwans.

His disciples

Amongst his prominent disciples may be mentioned Ariyakkudi Ramanuja Iyengar, Kandanur Srinivasa Iyengar, Salem Duraiswami Iyengar, Karaikudi Rajamani Iyengar and Kuttalam Srinivasayyar.

He had a passionate desire for performing Harikatha Kalakshepams but did not take the requisite steps to equip himself for the task. He was a great devotee of Sri Rama and his great Bhakta, Tyagabrahmam. He was for some years the Vice-President of the organisation which then conducted the Tyagaraja festival at Tiruvadi (Tiruvaiyar). In that capacity he rendered valuable service.

He was deeply interested in the study of advanced musicology. In his private library were such valuable manuscripts like the *Vyasa katakam*, *Ragatala prastaram* and *Tala samuddhiram*. When somebody once asked Konerirajapuram Vaidyanatha Ayyar to clarify a certain point in the science of music, the latter replied "I am only a gayaka! Go to Ramnad Srinivasa Iyengar and consult him. He is not only an eminent gayaka but also a front rank Vidvan steeped in musical learning."

He carried on his profession with great dignity. He took care to see that every one of his concerts was successful. On the morning of his concerts, he met his accompanists and informed them the pieces, the ragas, and the Pallavi that he proposed to sing that evening. The accompanists felt encouraged thereby and gave of their best in the evening.

He invariably came to the concert hall at least 15 minutes ahead of the time fixed for the commencement of the concert. He tuned the tambura and sat on the platform. The accompanists tuned their instruments and punctually started the concert at the scheduled time. Even if the full audience had not gathered by that time, he started his concert. When the secretary of the sabha or some other admirer suggested that he can wait for a few minutes and start after the hall had become fairly full, he replied "Let me start at the time announced. By the time the full

audience assembles, the requisite musical atmosphere would have been created and we (the performers) would also get into fine form.”

He started his concerts with the celebrated “*Viriboni varna*” in Bhairavi raga which not only created the requisite musical atmosphere but also brought the musicians into form. During the earlier part of his concerts, he sang pieces in ragas with the antara gandhara, like *Sugunamule* (Chakravaka), *Inta paraka* (Nadanamakriya), and *Teratiyyagarada* (Gaulipantu). His rendering of *Nimadichallaga* (Anandabhairavi raga) and niraval and kalpana svaras for the opening part of the charana *Talli tandri guru* were fascinating. Like his guru, he sang one or two of his own compositions towards the close of his concert.

He is a *svanama mudrakara*. His kritis, *Sri Raghukulanidhim* (Huseni), *Saragunapalimpa* (Kedaragaula) and *Paramapavana Rama* (Purvakalyani) and his Varnas, *Ninnu Kori* (Mohanam) *Neranammili* (Kanada) are fine compositions and will endure for long.

The appellation Poochchi

There are various versions as to the association of the word Poochchi (பூச்சி) with the name of Srinivasa Iyengar. People generally are fond of referring to great musicians through some appellation or other.

Poochchi literally meaning an insect, came to be associated with his name, because the ring of his voice compared favourably with the delightful humming of the beetle (வண்டு நீங்காரம்).

Another version is that the name Poochchu (பூச்சு) became Poochchi (பூச்சி.) It is said that Ramnad Srinivasa Iyengar was very fond of coating his body with sandal

paste after his meal. (This is one of the healthy customs in India. The application of the sandal paste on the stomach after a meal conduces to healthy digestion. Besides the paste gives a pleasant smell.) In the case of Srinivasa Iyengar, it appears he had a fondness for applying a thick coat of sandal paste on his body and hence the name Poochchu Srinivasa Iyengar, which later became Poochchi Srinivasa Iyengar.

A third version is that on account of his 'smartness and quick movements' he was called Poochchi, early in his life, by his father.

Whatever it be, Poochchi is only a complementary reference to him and has no odium about it.

Anecdote

Once, while returning from a bazaar after making a purchase, he set foot on a rind of plantain fruit and slipped and fell on the road. As a consequence he sustained a fracture and was bed-ridden for some weeks. Failing to get cured in the normal course, he composed the song *Saraguna palimpa* in Kedaragaula praying to Lord Venkateswara that He might come to his rescue. The reference to Gajendra moksha in the first avarta of the charana has a special significance. Gajendra was unable to extricate his foot from the grip of the Crocodile's mouth. Finding that his own strength was of no avail, He fervently appealed to God and got the needed protection. Likewise Srinivasa Iyengar who suffered from a fracture in his leg, finding medical treatment of no avail, appealed to God and got cured.



Anantarama Bhagavatar

7. ANANTARAMA BHAGAVATAR (1867—1919)

He was born in the Chitra star of the Aippasi month of the Prabhava year, corresponding to Sunday, 27th October, 1867, in Tondikulam, a village in Palghat Taluq. He was the second son of Krishna Sastri, a Pauranika. Early in his life he showed talents in music. He studied under Mahadeva Bhagavatar of Nurani for seven years. He stayed in Tiruvaiyar for 2 years and while there, continued to listen to the music of Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar. (See P. 50 for details of his stay in Tiruvaiyar). After marriage, he started life as a professional singer. He stayed in Madras for 12 years and during this period cultivated the acquaintance of the renowned Harikatha performer, Pandit Lakshmanachariyar and became proficient in the art of performing Kalakshepams. He was invited to give concerts in many places. He was appointed samasthana vidwan in Mysore during the reign of H. H. Krishna Raja Wadiyar. He spent his last days in Kalpathi, in Palghat.

He was a tall person. He was fair-skinned and had a commanding personality. He was held in great esteem by the vidvans of his time.

He was endowed with an impressive and melodious voice. There was stamina in his voice. The voice maintained its easy, responsive quality right through his concerts.

In his performances, one heard all the subtleties and excellences of vocal music. It was a delight to listen to his rendering of *mudritam* and other graces characteristic of vocal music.

Anecdotes

1. While young, he went to Tiruvaiyar to study under Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar. In those days, it was difficult for even vidvans to get admitted as students under Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar and stay in his house. Anantarama Bhagavataṛ played a ruse. He grew a beard and pretended that he was a mantrika (i.e., well versed in magic) from Malabar. Ramaswamy Sivan who had a leaning towards the art of magic felt interested in him. On his recommendation, Anantarama Bhagavataṛ was admitted as a sishya. After profiting by two years of stay in Tiruvaiyar, he came back well equipped and started on his professional career.

2. The commanding and arresting nature of his music was patent to every one. Further he was very strong in rhythm. Many knew that even without accompaniments he could make his concerts a thorough success.

Once when Govindaswamy Pillai, the renowned violinist was at the height of his fame, a performance by Anantarama Bhagavataṛ to the Violin accompaniment of Mr. Pillai was arranged in the Tondai Mandalam High School Hall in Madras. The admirers of Mr. Pillai needlessly feared that the Bhagavataṛ may spring some surprises that day by singing an intricate pallavi or by singing kalpana svaras to an intricate theme and land Mr. Pillai in an awkward situation. In their over zeal, they got him drunk and made him unfit for playing violin that day. A large crowd had gathered to listen to the performance. When it came to be known that Mr. Pillai was unwell and could not come, many people clamoured for refund of the ticket money. Anantarama Bhagavataṛ just said "Please stay for the performance. Just see if I cannot please all of you

without the violin accompaniment.” This remark had its desired effect. Even the few that took the refund came back to listen to Anantarama Bhagavatar. That day the Bhagavatar sang for 5 hours. All the people heard him with rapt attention. It was one of the excellent performances that he ever gave.

3. Once Govindaswamy Pillai accompanied Anantarama Bhagavathar on the Violin. During the alapana of the major raga, the Violinist touched the atitara shadja on the Violin and produced a delightful effect. When the Bhagavathar's turn came, he continued the alapana in mandra sthayi and gradually went down to anumandra sthayi touching the notes *ni* and *dha* of that octave. Mr. Pillai could not reproduce those notes since the lowest note given by the fourth string on the Violin was only the mandra shadja. The Bhagavatar must have got this idea of touching the anumandra *ni* and *dha* from his Guru Coimbatore Raghava Iyer.

Section II. Pioneer Instrumentalists

8. VEENA VENKATARAMANA DAS **(1866—1948)**

Venkataramana Das was born on the Magha Bahula Ashtami day of the Krodhana year corresponding to Thursday, February, 8th, 1866. His birth star was Visakam. He was a Madhva Brahmin and belonged to the Saunakasi gotra. His father was Chinna Gururayacharyulu and his mother Lakshmi Narasamma. For over seven generations his family has been a family of musicians. The grandfather of Venkataramana Das and the grandfather of Veena Seshanna of Mysore were brothers. Pachchimiriya Adiyappiah, the celebrated composer of the Viriboni Varna (Bhairavi) was an ancestor of these two distinguished Vainikas. Vizianagaram has carved for itself an honoured place on the musical map of India, largely due to the patronage of Maharajah Ananda Gajapati and the illustrious musicians that adorned the place like Gururayacharyulu, Durvasula Suryanarayana Sastrulu, Venkataramana Das, Adibhatla Narayana Das and Kala Prapurna Dwaram Venkataswami Naidu Garu.

Veena Play

Venkataramana Das was a dynamic performer. To listen to his concerts was a treat, intellectual and aesthetic. On an average, he practised for ten to twelve hours a day. His daily practices included (1) technical exercises in four degrees of speed in all the three octaves and (2) Tanas of



Vina Venkataramana Das

variegated patterns and tempo. During his early morning practices, he partially muted the strings by passing a handkerchief over the playing strings near the region of the bridge in a cross-wise manner. He practised buskies and dandals regularly. The fore-arm of his right hand was strong, stout and well-developed like that of a champion tennis player.

The three striking features of his play were:—

- (1) the remarkably rich tone that he produced
- (2) the unimaginable speed that he developed
- (3) the fecundity of his creative skill.

He played pieces like *Koluwaiyunnade* (Bhairavi) and *Sri Subrahmanyaya Namaste* (Kambhoji) with amazing rapidity, every note of the compositions in the trikala sangatis being heard with surprising clearness. When he played trikala tanas, one got the impression that heaps of pearls were literally being dropped on to the floor from the ceiling.

Honours

The title of *Shatkala Chakravarti* was conferred upon him for his extraordinary speed in vina play.

Lord Curzon while presenting the distinguished Vainika with a Simha talatam (a bracelet set with precious stones and with the figure of a lion-head on either side) early in this century, paid a handsome tribute to him. This Simhatalatam as also the costly sadaras received by Venkataramana Das in the various samasthanams can still be seen in his house in Vizianagaram.

It is very appropriate that the street wherein he lived in Vizianagaram is named *Veenavari Street*. This reminds one of Wagner Strasse (street) in Cologne, Germany.

Ananda Gajapati and Venkataramana Das were playing Veena together face to face for a period of 19 years. The Ruler gave him lands besides a house.

The rich tone and technique of his Vina play

The rich tone of his Veena was due to the following causes :—

- (1) His impressive plucking and fingering.
- (2) The shorter length of his vina which enabled him to tune the instrument to a high pitch.
- (3) The thick strings that he used. The anumandra string of his vina was a double-twisted metallic string.
- (4) The large size of the gourd resonator on the top.
- (5) The absence of the waxy ledge.
- (6) The Vina being of the Ekanda type.

(In the Ekanda vina, the entire instrument is scooped out of a single block of wood. In the present-day veenas, the bowl, the dandi and the head-piece are separate pieces made and joined together. If these three parts were made from the wood of the same tree, the instrument will be uniformly responsive. But in practice, this is rarely the case. Ekanda vinas are ideal and are uniformly responsive over the entire body of the instrument).

In his veena, he used a ledge of ebony and the 24 frets were screwed on to this wooden ledge at the correct positions. The ebony ledge was exactly shaped like the waxy ledge and it rested on a wooden plate which was screwed on to the dandi. From the point of view of instrumentation, this arrangement is of special interest. The waxy ledge arrests to some extent the free vibration of the dandi.

Venkataramana Das had to travel to places of varying seasonal conditions in the course of his professional career. The re-setting of frets on the waxy ledges whenever they got out of tune, presented a problem. He solved this difficulty and with advantage by having recourse to a wooden ledge. The frets of his 'Veena were of steel and each fret was welded on to a rectangular brass plate. These plates were screwed on to the ledge of wood, at the correct positions. The entire fret board was glued on to a wooden plate and the whole part screwed on to the dandi at three places. When the fret board was removed, the instrument actually became a gotuvadyam.

From a single svarasthana he used to play as many as six higher notes by deflecting the string to the required extent.

Sometimes he played beautiful combinations by tapping the strings in the region of the head i.e., between the pegs and the top of the dandi.

Once he played the gita *Sri Ramachandra* in Bhairavi raga, Dhruva tala by keeping his finger wholly on the 3rd svarasthana, and by playing alternately on the Panchama string and the Sarani string.

The head-piece of his vina was not carved into the shape of a Yali, but into an ornamental floral design after the Vallaki type of Vina. In his Vina, the length of the dandi and the head part together was equal to the circumference of the bowl. In the present-day vinas, the length of the dandi will be found to be equal to twice the diameter of the bowl. It is usual for the height of the bowl to be equal to its diameter.

In his Vina, there was a steel plate on the top of the bridge and the side bridge was an arc of bronze. The rings on the langer had a fish plate metallic top which facilitated easy movement.

Venkataramana Das was also a good performer on the Sitar and Rudra Vina. The plucking technique of the Sitar helped him to play tanas on the vina in an attractive manner.

Chakra-bandham

It was a pleasure to look at the graceful and circling movement of the fingers when he played Chakra-bandham. A sanchari of sixty-four avartas in Sriraga was played in the Chakra-bandham style, the svarasthanas touched on all the four strings being only the third, fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh.

A vina with a metallic spring and suspended from the under side of the top-plank was presented to him by a former Maharajah of Mysore. In this instrument when necessary, it was just tilted and the spring inside gave a ringing melodious series of sounds. This series of notes was in consonance with the pitch of the instrument.

A vina made of sampangi wood is also seen in his house.

He has delighted Madras audiences a number of times with his scholarly performances. His concerts were discourses on absolute music. His alapanas and tanas took rasikas to the unknown regions of aesthetic paradise. In many of his concerts he did not have even a mridangam player to accompany him.

Vina Rahasya Prakasika

Venkataramana Das is the author of a small book in Telugu entitled *Vina Rahasya Prakasika*. It was published in 1912. The book contains 16 Sanskrit slokas with the meaning in Telugu. After explaining the fundamentals of the technique of Vina play, the author explains the varieties of Bandha Tanam (Guchcha bandham and Naga bandham).

Participation in Music Conferences

Venkataramana Das was a prominent figure in the Music conferences convened by Abraham Panditar of Tanjore between 1912 and 1916. He also played a prominent part in the deliberations of the first All-India Music Conference held in 1916 at Baroda.

Venkataramana Das lost his wife when he was twenty-two years of age, and did not marry afterwards. About the year 1926, by a cruel misfortune deafness seized him. In spite of the best medical aid he did not recover from this affliction. Since then he became virtually lost to the world of music.

Venkataramana Das passed away on the 28th February, 1948 leaving the world of music distinctly the poorer.

Anecdotes

1. Once when he performed in the Senate House, Madras, rains set in. In a few minutes there was a heavy downpour. The organisers tried to close the doors and windows in order to minimise the noise from outside. Venkataramana Das challenged that he will make himself heard and desired that the doors and windows be kept open.

He played remarkably well and the audience became oblivious of the fact that there was the heavy downpour outside.

2. He went to Mayavaram and there stayed for some time as the honoured guest of Vina Vaidyanatha Ayyar. The latter asked him to play on his vina. The vidvan from Vizianagaram politely declined to play on the instrument of the Mayavaram vainika. Mr. Ayyar however pressed his request. The Andhra vainika thereupon took the Tanjore model vina of his friend, tuned the strings to a high pitch, the pitch and tension in which he was accustomed to play. After playing for sometime, he pulled the sarani string sideways from a particular svarasthana to produce some higher notes. Immediately the langar of the string unable to bear the increased tension gave way and snapped. Venkataramana Das thereupon humorously remarked "Your vinas are all intended for being played by *ladies*. Our vinas are intended for being played by *men*."

3. In the year 1916, during the First All-India Music Conference in Baroda, a discussion took place between Mr. Fredelis, the Principal of the School of Music, Baroda and Venkataramana Das. Each maintained that he could reproduce on his instrument any music played by the other. Mr. Fredelis first played a fast melody on the piano. The vainika noted it in notation and immediately played it on his vina. The fast tempo of the music was of no concern to him. Venkataramana Das then played Tyagaraja's Kriti *Koluvaitynnade*, in Bhairavi raga. Mr. Fredelis could not reproduce this piece accurately on the piano, on account of the subtle srutis of the nishada svara in the piece.

4. An interesting incident that happened during one of his concerts in Madras may be mentioned. He performed in

the Gokhale Hall. At the conclusion of the concert he played the Mangalam '*Makulamunakiha*' in Surati Raga. After the mangalam was over he kept the vina at rest in front of him. (Venkataramana Das played the Veena in the Urdhva (vertical) posture and not in the '*Sayana*' (Horizontal) posture as is commonly the case). The audience of that time not being familiar with the mangalam in Surati raga, thought that the vidvan had played some piece in Surati raga and was just taking rest and that he would resume playing after some time. Finding the members of the audience still in their seats, the Vainika was in a dilemma. After a couple of minutes he said in Telugu in a faint tone to those in front "Do they want, me to play again? I have played the mangalam just now..." On hearing the word mangalam, the audience got up as one man unwillingly and went away.

9. SANGAMESWARA SASTRI

(1873—1932)

Among the top-ranking vainikas of the previous generation, Sangameswara Sastri (also called Sangama Sastrulu) occupies an honoured place. Tumarada was his house name. He was a Velanadu Telugu Brahmin. His father was Somayajulu and his mother Gunnamma. He was born in Bitivada Agraharam in Sangam Valasa of the Palakonda Taluq of Bobbili.

Early life and training

He was born in October 1873. He left his native place in his 8th year to study music under his brother-in-law (elder sister's husband) the renowned Nandigana Venkanna Garu (also called Venkayya Garu) of Bobbili. Venkanna Garu was a revered singer of the time. He had a rich and powerful voice. His voice reached large audiences. When he carried on his sadhakam in the bass part, the ground on which he sat used to vibrate and one felt this tremor perceptibly. He performed concerts to the accompaniment of the Vina.

Sangameswara Sastri spent the first four years in learning vocal music under Venkanna Garu and later learnt to play the Vina under him. Venkanna Garu was his sole Guru. Sangameswara Sastri did not learn music from any one else. Even during his training, discerning vidvans noticed in him the future prodigy. He practised incessantly on the Vina and with a degree of perseverance and steadfastness rarely noticed in the vidyarthi of the present day.



Sangameswara Sastri

It is this practice that was responsible for the brilliant character of his vina play.

His career

On the completion of his studies under Venkanna Garu, Paravastu Rangacharyulu the renowned scholar of the time, happened to hear Sangameswara Sastri's play on the vina. He felt thrilled at his performance. He took him to Vizagapatam, arranged for him concerts in the Gonevari Samasthanam and made him the recipient of many honours and costly presents. Subsequently in 1899 Sangameswara Sastri obtained the patronage of the zamindar of Khasimkota. Along with his patron he used to come to Madras. Once Sastri extended his stay in Madras for a year and during that period cultivated the acquaintance of the leading sangita vidvans of the time. He gave performances in the (now defunct) * Krishna Gana Sabha of Madras and various other places in the south. He performed in the Rama Mandiram in Govindappa Naicken Street, G. T. Madras in the presence of Tanjore Krishna Bhagavatar, Tachchur Singaracharlu and other eminent vidwans of the time and was presented with a toda (bracelet).

Sometime later he left Khasimkota and became the samasthana vidvan in Pithapuram. This proved a turning point in his career.

Tagore fascinated by his vina play

He enjoyed the patronage of the Maharajah of Pithapuram right till the end of his life. Not only did the Maharajah shower upon him honours and emoluments, but

* *The Krishna Gana Sabha* now functioning in T. Nagar, Madras is an institution started a few years back.

honoured suitably the Sangita vidvans who visited his Samasthanam. While at Pithapuram, Sastrulu came into contact with the revered Poet, Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore was so fascinated by his vina play that he took him to Calcutta and then to Bolpur. He kept him there for some months and derived aesthetic and spiritual exaltation by listening to the divine music of his Vina. Tagore later deputed two of his musicians to go to Pithapuram and learn Vina under Sangameswara Sastri.

In 1926, the Maharani of Burdwan presented him with a golden chain.

His practice and technique : Veyi Sadhakam

Sangameswara Sastri carried on his daily practices in the night from 11 p.m. till about 2 a.m. or 3 a.m. Each night he took up a raga for exposition and continued it right through the three or four hours of practice. It will be interesting to know how he attained the marvellous command over the Vina. It was literally due to *rakshasa sadhakam* i.e., incessant practice. Practice of the scale exercises in three degrees of speed (*trikala*) and in four degrees of speed is well known to students of music. But Sastri performed the *Veyi Sadhakam* i.e., playing a thousand times at a stretch the scale in three octaves in the quickest tempo possible. That is, he played *s r g m p d n s* in the lower octave, middle octave and upper octave in succession and followed it up with the playing of *s n d p m g r s* in the tara, madhya and mandra sthayis in succession. When this practice is done in the fourth degree of speed the veyi sadhakam may occupy about $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours. If in the course of this practice, a break or pause ensued, the practice was done afresh a thousand times, ignoring the number of times already practised.

This *tristhayi veyi sadhakam* was done as a spiritual offering and as a *niyama*. During a year this sadhakam was continued for a hundred days in succession i.e., a lakshavritti was completed. Sastrulu used to say that if the practice was diligently done a hundred thousand times, for the rest of the year this sadhakam need not be carried on and that the fingers will retain their fine responsive character. The *lakshavritti* gave the fingers strength, speed, facility, ease and freedom of execution. An amazingly rich tone also resulted therefrom. During the off season, when musicians remained in their head-quarters, they carried on this practice. Sastrulu insisted on his disciples performing the veyi sadhakam, though tiresome and boring it was, at the commencement. He advised them that without minding fatigue, perspiration and discomfort they should carry it on and that they would reap the fruits of this practice later in their lives.

In this connection it may be pointed out that it is usual for Western violinists to start the day's sadhakam with the practice of the scale in three octaves and in different positions : from the first to the eighth position.

Sangameswara Sastri sometimes produced effects on his Vina which resembled the megha gharjana (thunder) and at other times effects which resembled the sweet strains of the Kokila (musical bird). Without his right hand fingers, he sometimes played the vina with his left-hand fingers alone ; i.e., the left-hand fingers for plucking and playing music. Sometimes he played on all the strings simultaneously. He was a past-master in the technique of *Naga bandha svara sampradaya*.

Even Sangameswara Sastri used to say that in point of high speed, Venkataramana Das of Vizianagaram was

unapproachable. It is not surprising that the Vizianagaram Vainika was honoured with the enviable title of *Shatkala Chakravarti*. Sastri also admired Veena Seshanna of Mysore in the ease with which the latter played passages of flageolet notes on the Vina, by an ingenious and damped plucking.

Sangameswara Sastri held the Vina in the urdhva (vertical) posture and played. Two other prominent Vainikas who held the Vina in this position and played were Vizianagaram Venkataramana Das and Karaikkudi Subbarama Ayyar, the elder brother of the late Karaikkudi Sambasiva Iyer. The urdhva posture in play is characteristic of the Vainikas of Vizianagaram and Bobbili. In the temple sculptures we see the oblique postures and so the urdhva posture cannot be said to be very ancient. The present day practice of holding the vina in horizontal posture (more correctly at a slight inclination to the horizon) is only a few centuries old. The sculpture of a figure playing the Vina in the temple at Pattisvaram (near Kumbakonam) seems to be the earliest sculpture depicting this horizontal posture.

The Andhra Vainikas took pride in saying that the play in the urdhva posture was masculine play and the other was only feminine play. Both the postures have their advantages and disadvantages. In the case of Vinas intended for being played in the vertical posture, the length of the dandi was shorter than the normal vina and the svarasthanas of lower pitch were thus within easy reach and easily negotiable by the left hand. The bowl also was smaller. The short length of the dandi was taken advantage of and the instrument was tuned to the pitch of 5 or 5½ (G or G sharp) and played. But the vertical vina used by Karaikkudi Subbarama Ayyar was of the normal size.

His methods of teaching

Sangameswara Sastri was a good teacher. There was a *vitaraṇa* (planned method) in his teaching. But on account of the rigour, arduousness and exacting character of his lessons, many did not stick to him and come up to his level of eminence. He concentrated on developing *swarajñāna* in his disciples. If while teaching, he heard casually a street hawker's cry, he suddenly sprang a surprise on his disciples by asking them to tell the *swaras* of the hawker's cry.

Sangameswara Sastri was also an expert violinist. He played the *Nagasvaram* also. Whenever he noticed a new technique in the play of another *vidvān*, he straightaway practised it a number of times and became familiar with it. Nothing was impossible for him. Whenever people came and requested him to play, he never stood on formalities, but straightaway played on the *Veena* to the delight of the visitors. The *Vina* was the mother, the *Vina* was God and the *Vina* was everything for him.

His religious-mindedness

Sangameswara Sastri was a pious and devout man. He was a *Lalita Devi upasaka*. He performed *Devi Puja* on Fridays. On those days his performances on the *Vina* were characterised by remarkable beauty and excellence.

His end

On the day of his demise, he became conscious of his approaching end. He felt he was going to survive only for a few hours more. Lying on the bed, he had the *Vina* placed on the chest parallel to his body and played cheerfully the *Anandabhairavi* raga till the end. The soul left his body to the sweet strains of his *Vina* music.

Like many great men he was not blessed with the fortunes of this worldly life. He has however left a permanent mark in the realm of instrumentation. His herculean achievements in vina play have passed into history. The strains of his vina music are still ringing in the ears of those who have had the privilege of listening to him.

Sangameswara Sastri has composed a Kriti in Kalyani Raga, Adi tala in Sanskrit, beginning with the words "*Gana nayakam.*" He has signed the piece with his own name.

10. VEENA SESHANNA (1850—1926)

The first quarter of the twentieth century witnessed the brilliant *trio* in the realm of Vina music: Venkataramana Das, Sangameswara Sastri and Seshanna. Each developed a distinctive style and technique of play.

Early Life And Training

Seshanna was born in the year 1850 in Mysore. He was a Madhva Brahmin. He belonged to a family of musicians. One of his ancestors was Pachchimiriya Adiyappiah, the celebrated composer of the famous varna *Viriboni* in Bhairavi raga. Seshanna's father was Chikkarappa, the Asthana Vainika vidvan of Mysore. Even at the age of 5, Seshanna exhibited remarkable talents in music. He gave early proofs of his sound svaragnana and tala gnana. As a boy of eight, he was presented with costly Khillats in the palace. He got married in his 12th year. Shortly afterwards, he lost his father.

He first started learning vocal music. Later, he continued his studies in music under Mysore Sadasiva Rao and Veena Venkatasubbayya, the father of Vainika pravina Subbanna of Mysore. Endowed with a keen intellect, he soon attained mastery over the art of vina play. In his twentieth year, he travelled all over South India and came into contact with the prominent musicians of that time. His visits to Madras, Tanjore and Travancore were particularly useful to him. On his return to Mysore, he was appointed Asthana Vidvan. A few years later, he was invited by the

Gaekwar of Baroda. His performance there was very much appreciated. The Gaekwar honoured him with a *Mena* (palanquin). Several distinctions were conferred upon him.

Besides Veena, he practised the Jalatarangam, Swarabat and Violin and attained a high degree of proficiency in playing on those instruments. He also practised the Piano.

His Play

His Vina play was characterised by Madhurya (sweetness), delicacy and nicety. Unlike the Andhra Vainikas, he held the veena in the horizontal posture and played. His music was uniformly melodious and fine. There was neither staleness nor monotony in his performances. Every concert of his was refreshingly fresh. The master touch in vina play was in evidence right through his concerts. He raised the standard of appreciation through his performances. He was a past master in the art of producing flageolet notes. He played rapid passages of flageolet tones on the vina.

His Compositions

He has composed Svarajatis, Varnas, Kritis and Tillanas. Their musical construction is good. His tillanas are lively compositions. He has written some svarajatis for being performed by melodic orchestras.

He was the Asthana Vidvan in Mysore till his last days and held the post with great dignity and honour. He was easily accessible to one and all. He has raised the prestige of Mysore and made it an important seat of music. Even western musicians who were generally indifferent to Indian music, were attracted to it by the charm of his play.

The Vainika Sikhamani passed away on the 25th July 1926.

11. SARABHA SASTRI

(1872—1904)

If the flute enjoys the status of a concert instrument at the present day, it is due to the pioneering efforts of Sarabha Sastrigal. He showed the remarkable possibilities and potentialities of this ubiquitous instrument. During the brief span of his life, he literally thrilled the world of music through his magnificent and soul-stirring performances on the flute. Prior to his time, the flute was just an accompanying instrument. It was used as an accompaniment in dance performances and in recitals of sacred music.

Early life and training

Sarabha Sastrigal was born in Kumbakonam in 1872. He was a Tamil Brahmin and belonged to the Ashtasahasram sect. When he became blind at the age of two, the father became perplexed. He was anxiously planning for his future. An idea struck him that he might be given training in music. When he had not reached even the age of ten, the father cut a stem of bamboo from the backyard of his house and converted it into a flute by boring holes on it. When the boy applied the mouth-hole of the instrument near his lips and blew, a delightful note emanated. The father was pleased beyond measure and made him learn the svara exercises. The boy endowed with precocious talents and a keen intellect made rapid progress. He later learnt Tyagaraja's kritis under Manambuchavadi Venkatasubbayyar and shot into fame. As a boy, he began to give performances.

The superb character of his play

Words can hardly describe the greatness of Sarabha Sastrigal in the realm of Karnatic music. The extraordinary eminence that he attained in flute play must be ascribed to the spark of divinity within him. Like many geniuses he died very young. But within the short period of his life, he achieved the distinction of being a star of the first magnitude in the world of Karnatic music. He was endowed with a melodious voice. His scholarship in Sanskrit was of a high order. He could not only compose in Sanskrit but also speak that language with grammatical accuracy. His scholarship in Telugu, Tamil and Mahratti was equally profound. He was also proficient on the violin and mridangam and was capable of performing on those instruments in concerts.

The finger-strokes (ஹிரஸ்யக்ஷ) of his flute play had an ornamental finish about them. When he played the sangatis of the kriti, *Nagumomu ganaleni* (Abheri raga), the audience literally got the impression of a group of sparrows flying in the sky with fluttering wings.

The flow of melody from his enchanting flute was sweet and delightful. The captivating tone of his flute had the element of divinity in it. His sense of rhythm made one feel that he was a veritable amsa of Brahma, the rhythmical accompanist to Nataraja. Brilliant contemporaries of his, like Palani Ghatam Krishnayyar, Kanjira Mamundia Pillai, Dakshinamurti Pillai, Tiruvaiyar Subrahmanya Ayyar, Tirukkodikaval Krishnayyar, Tirumarugal Natesa Pillai and Ettaiyapuram Ramachandra Bhagavatar have with one voice proclaimed that there was none to equal Sastrigal in his extraordinary tala jnanam.

His defective vision led him to devise a new method of keeping tala. He played kalpana svaras without looking for rhythmical guidance from others. (Let it be remembered that whereas a singer can reckon the tala with his hand, the same facility is not available to a flutist, since both his hands are engaged in play. He can only use his feet for the purpose). His methods of auto-reckoning of time have since been adopted by all flutists. In his faultless rendering of Tyagaraja's kritis, he but followed in the footsteps of Patnam Subrahmanya Ayyar and the Umaiyaipuram disciples of the great composer. If any new sangati (variation) suddenly flashed across his mind, he would straightaway play it in as polished a manner as the familiar ones. Such new sangatis fitted in with the composition very well.

His music sense and fingering were so perfect that he could play anything at the mere hearing of it. He never played a piece with the musical setting (dhatu) in his mind, but played with the sahitya (matu) conscience. That accounts for the magnetic charm underlying his rendering of kritis. The torrential flow of the kalpana svaras played at terrific speed by him for the kriti *Bhavanuta* (Mohana raga) produced a bewildering effect on his accompanists and listeners. Though his repertoire was very extensive, yet he played only a few select pieces in his concerts.

He was a marvellous performer and his concerts were the envy of his contemporaries.

Since the Todi raga used four semi-tones, he had a special flute made with finger-holes specially dispersed which enabled him to play the raga without resorting to the partial opening of the concerned finger-holes. Later on, however, he played Todi raga with one and the same flute.

Professional integrity was almost a religion with him. He had his graded rates for concert engagements in the different areas of the Madras State. He would accept neither a rupee more nor a rupee less. Even if as a token of special appreciation he was offered something extra, he would politely refuse it. He would come to the concert hall punctually. If for some reason the time of the concert was changed, he would return home without performing. (Only flutists can appreciate the attitude of Sastrigal on such occasions).

His Compositions

In his poetic genius he can be compared to some of the great luminaries of the past. For the series of Kalakshepams on the 63 Nayanmars (Saivite saints), he has composed about five hundred story songs in both Mahratti and Tamil. These songs were used by Sulamangalam Vaidyanatha Bhagavatar in his Kalakshepams on the 63 saints.

Sarabha Sastrigal was hailed as an avatar of Krishna. He rarely practised at home. People who came to his house to listen to his practice at home were sorely disappointed. His frequent concerts kept him in form. He might have avoided practising at home for two reasons:—

1. Conserve his lung energy.
2. To avoid the coming of snakes which were in plenty on the banks of the river Kaveri, close to his place.

His disciples

1. Venugana Siromani Palladm Sanjiva Rao.
2. Ashtaputra Venkatarama Sastri. (a nephew of Sarabha Sastri).

Anecdotes

1. On the occasion of a marriage in his house in Swamimalai (near Kumbakonam) he gave a concert to the accompaniment of Tirukkodikaval Krishnayyar (violin), Mamundia Pillai (kanjira) and Alaganambi Pillay (mridangam). During the pallavi, Sastrigal and Krishnayyar played for a considerable length of time single avarta kalpana svaras by turns. Deeply moved by his tala jnanam and the richness of his creative faculty, Mamundia Piliyai paid a tribute to him and said "None can excel you in your accurate tala jnanam".

2. In Konapattu in Chettinad, Sarabha Sastrigal once gave a concert to the accompaniment of Palani Krishnayyar (ghatam) and Vaidyanatha Bhagavatar (violin). Tirumarugal Natesan, the eminent Nagaswaram player, was also present at that time. When he heard the superb Todi raga alapana from the flute, Natesan was visibly touched and remarked.

"Who can play Todi so well". At the conclusion of the concert, Natesan accompanied Sastrigal home. Expressing his appreciation of the performance once again, he said "After listening to your soul-stirring music, I am wondering if I can justifiably pursue a musical career any further".

3. Sarabha Sastrigal was an *eka santa grahi* i.e. one who imbibed a thing by listening to it only once. He was therefore able to attain marvellous proficiency in the sphere of both art and learning. If a passage was read to him or if he heard a song once, he would straightaway reproduce it.

Once he attended the Nritya nataka "*Prahlada Charitram*" in Sulamangalam. This is the masterpiece of the great writer of dance dramas, Merattur Venkatarama Sastri. He attended the performance right from beginning to the end. Next morning, before Sulamangalam Vaidyanatha Bhagavatar and others he gave a complete recital of the play with all the padyas and darus to the astonishment of all.

4. At one of his concerts, Mamundia Pillai was providing the Kanjira accompaniment. When Sarabha Sastrigal played the Pallavi after a detailed alapana, the Kanjira accompanist surprised him by playing the Pallavi in the immediate lower degree of speed. When he concluded, Sastrigal surprised the entire audience further, by himself playing the Pallavi in the tempo immediately below the one chosen by Mamundia Pillai. This proves the extraordinary control over rhythm possessed by him.

5. During a certain marriage, Umaiyalpuram Krishna Bhagavatar and Sarabha Sastrigal were invited to give concerts. Sastrigal heard Krishna Bhagavatar sing the kriti *Nivada negana* of Tyagaraja in Saranga raga. That was the first time that he heard the kriti. Next day in his concert, he played the kriti exquisitely and to the joy of all, including Krishna Bhagavatar. The Bhagavatar was much moved and exclaimed 'Oh! How I wish that my Guru (the great Tyagaraja) was bodily present here to listen to this polished, stylish and flawless rendering of his piece.'

To play without practice a kriti and that too a Kriti in a bhashanga raga is no easy task for a flutist. The complexity in this particular case is increased by the fact that the

dhaivata svara is sounded in two different pitches, in the phrases $D \ n \ \dot{S}$ and $d \ d \ p \ m$.

6. On more than one occasion, he played the Punna-gavarali raga and made snakes come out of their hiding holes and dance before him. Sarabha Sastri was a very sensitive man.

Once he accepted a concert engagement in a marriage house. At the time of the commencement of the performance, he took the flute and started playing. The proud bride who had heard so much about Sastrigal's reputation, ridiculed at the tiny instrument handled by him. Sastrigal took it to heart and at the end of the concert played Punna-gavarali raga. After some time, a cobra suddenly rushed into the concert hall, spread out its hood before him and began to dance to his music. The entire audience was thrown into a state of flutter. Sastrigal was informed gently of the appearance of the snake before him. He played the raga reaching the climax and gradually finished it. The snake too, satiated, crawled back and left that place quietly without harming anybody.

7. Tirumarugal Natesa Pillai, the eminent Nagasvara vidvan took a delight in listening to Sastrigal's music. Once he was engaged to perform in the Parthasarathyswamy temple procession in Triplicane, Madras. As the procession came to Singarachari Street, somebody whispered to him that Sastrigal's flute concert was taking place in a house nearby. Immediately he gave his Nagasvaram to his assistant and asked him to continue the play and pretended to come back in a few minutes. He went to the flute concert and got absorbed in the play of Sarabha Sastrigal. He forgot

all about his engagement. As the procession of the Deity was nearing the temple, his close associates rushed to him and brought him back. He then resumed his play on the Nagaswaram and finished the performance in the normal course.

8. Once, in the Punarvasu Sabha in Mint Street, Madras, a flute performance of Sarabha Sastrigal had been arranged. The accompanists on the occasion were: Tiruk-kodikaval Krishnayyar (violin), Seturam Rao (Mridangam) and Umaiyalpuram Narayana Ayyar (Ghatam). An interesting incident took place that day. The earlier part of the programme was as usual occupied with the polished rendering of some kritis by the flutist and the violinist. Sastrigal then began Kambhoji raga and played the introductory part of the *alapana* lasting for about five minutes. Krishnayyar responded on the violin in a spirited manner and drew repeated applauses from the audience. Sastrigal himself was moved to raptures by the brilliant *alapana* of his accompanist. Finding that it would be ineffective to proceed with the *alapana* any further, he straightaway began the *pallavi*. He gave a remarkable and inspired exposition of the *pallavi*. The creative spark in him had been kindled to a brilliant glow. He just played for about ten minutes and drew thunderous applauses from the audience for every *avarta*. His performance literally stupefied even the mighty Krishnayyar. The concert continued for two hours after this incident. The audience was thrilled by the inspiring music of that evening. The one opinion of all listeners was that it was an even contest and that neither Sastrigal nor Krishnayyar could steal a march over the other.



Tirukodikaval Krishnayyar

12. TIRUKKODIKAVAL KRISHNAYYAR

(1857—1913)

The advent of the violin about the year 1800 is an important landmark in the history of South Indian concert music. The easily portable nature of the instrument, its rich tone, its compass of four octaves, the advantage that it possessed in enabling notes of continuous duration being played with the help of the bow (a facility not available in plucked instruments), its plain finger-board enabling various gamakas to be played with ease, all these commended themselves. An accompanying instrument satisfying these needs was felt as a desideratum for long. The violin came at the right time to fulfil this need. The western system of tuning into fifths *G D A E* was changed into fifths and fourths *G D G D* to suit the requirements of Karnatic music.

An enthusiastic band of vidvans from Baluswamy Dikshitar (1786–1858) downwards practised the instrument with great patience and diligence. Its possibilities and potentialities as an ideal accompaniment in concerts of music, dance and kalakshepam were soon perceived. A technique of play suited to the genius of Karnatic music was gradually evolved. Amongst the stalwarts in violin play, Tirukkodikaval Krishnayyar occupies an honoured place.

Early life and training

Krishnayyar was born in the year 1857 in the village Maratturai in Tanjore District. His ancestors had a leaning towards the Bhagavata sampradaya and generally were acquainted with music. His father Kuppuswamy bhagavatar

was a successful performer of Harikatha Kalakshepams. He was proficient in the five languages, Sanskrit, Mahratti, Tamil, Telugu and Kannada. Amongst his brilliant contemporaries were Tiruvalangadu Vina Tyagaraja Sastri, Sattanur Panju Ayyar and Kottavasal Venkatrama Ayyar.

Krishnayyar first learnt music under his father. Then he pursued the study of music under Kottavasal Venkatarama Ayyar, a renowned composer of tana varnas. As he did not have a good singing voice, he was persuaded to practise an instrument. His father took him to Sattanur Panchanada Ayyar and made his son study violin under him. Krishnayyar later came into contact with the renowned vidwan, Fiddle Subbarayar and learnt the secrets of violin play under him. He followed his methods of practice and soon attained a high degree of proficiency in the art. He listened also to the Vina play of Tiruvalangadu Tyagaraja Sastri every day.

His daily practice

Krishnayyar practised the Sarali exercises and Varnas every day. He practised the svara exercises in four sthayis (octaves) in very slow tempo and in very fast tempo. He practised the notes plainly and also practised playing them with relevant gamakas. He used to play the svara exercises on a single string. He practised playing in a single stroke of the bow 4, 8, 16, 32 and 64 notes. He developed a high speed in violin play.

Whatever be the number of concert engagements that he had to fulfil on a day, he invariably practised the violin from 3 a. m. to 7 a. m. everyday. Amongst the varnas which he practised frequently were the Ata tala Varnas in

Kalyani (*Vanajakshi*) and Bhairavi (*Viriboni*) and the Aditala varnas in Saveri (*Sarasuda*) and Begada (*Inta chalamu*).

He learnt many compositions from Vina Vaidyanatha Ayyar of Mayavaram. He also improved his knowledge of the science of music from his talks with him.

As an accompanist

He was a loyal accompanist and invariably strove to make his principal's music shine in all its grandeur. His accompaniment was such that it served to stimulate the creative talents in the principal and made him sing or perform with enthusiasm.

He proved a worthy accompaniment in the concerts of Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar. His responses to the latter's rapid flights in the sphere of creative music were as splendid as they were thrilling. With the exception of a few top-ranking musicians like Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar, Patnam Subrahmanya Ayyar and Sarabha Sastrigal, other vidvans generally avoided having him as their violin accompaniment, since he easily dwarfed them into insignificance by his magnificent play. The principal performers found it hard to maintain their own against the sweeping avalanches of his brilliant creations. The sheer weight and richness of his music left a deep impression on the minds of his listeners. Performers who were clubbed with Krishnayyar failed to exhibit even half their normal standard of performance.

As a soloist

Krishnayyar was at his best in his solo recitals. His genius found full scope for display on those occasions. As a soloist, he has left an indelible mark in the history of concert music. His violin literally reproduced the words of the

sahitya of the song. When he played Tyagaraja's "*Bhajare bhajamanasa Ramam*" in Kannada raga, the audience got the impression that the violin was actually singing the words of the song and not merely reproducing the musical setting of the piece. His concerts were listened to in pindrop silence. His expositions of ragas in the mandra sthayi were veritable aural feasts. On such occasions the rich bass notes of his violin reverberated through the auditorium in a resounding manner. Taking a musical phrase, he used to present it in different ornamental garbs. Whenever he was invited to perform as an accompaniment, he was in addition invariably given a solo engagement.

Once during the Dasara festival series in Kakinada (Andhra Pradesh), he gave a solo performance on the violin. That day, he played alapana and pallavi in Saveri raga for more than four hours. The audience literally drank of the sweet nectar of divine nada that evening and forgot all about their mundane needs and wants.

The secret of his marvellous achievement was due to the fact that he kept himself in fine form through constant practice. His fingers faithfully reproduced all the thoughts that generated within him. His raga alapanas were literally discourses on the nadatma forms of the chosen ragas. Steeped in devotion to Nadabrahma, he practised with an iron will to achieve the best in the realm of art. He practised with a degree of perseverance rarely noticed in others. He played the compositions of Tyagaraja with considerable skill and understanding. The quintessence of each raga was presented by him as cream.

Krishnayyar became the chief musician in the Tiruvaduturai Mutt. He provided Violin accompaniment to

the Vidvans who were invited to perform before the head of the Mutt. He was honoured in the courts of Pudukkottai Ramnad and Mysore.

He held the post of Village Munsiff of his village Tirukkodikaval.

His Disciples

- (1) His eldest son Ramayyar,
- (2) Ramaswamy Ayyar (guru of Kumbakonam Rajamanikkam Pillai)
- (3) Semmangudi Narayanaswamy Ayyar.
- (4) Mylapore Venkataramayyar.

Krishnayyar passed away on the 28th January 1913.

Anecdotes

1. Once, on the occasion of a festival in Tiruppapuliur, the invincible Ramachandra Bhagavathar of Ettaiyapuram and Tirukkodikaval Krishnayyar gave a concert. Nadanama-kriya raga was taken up for detailed exposition that day. The Bhagavathar sang the *alapana* splendidly and followed it up with the pallavi "*Engum nirainda Nadanama kripanidhe*". Krishnayyar was more than a match for him. The dazzling lustre of his violin music outshone the vocal music, splendid though it was. Several vidwans naturally did not relish the idea of taking Krishnayyar as an accompaniment. It was only in the concerts of Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar and Sarabha Sastrigal that the scales were evenly maintained and Krishnayyar's violin did not over-assert itself.

2. On a certain occasion in Kumbakonam, Sarabha Sastrigal and Tirukkodikaval Krishnayyar had been invited for a performance. Kalyani raga was taken up for the

day. In the course of the alapana, the prati madhyama (F sharp) was taken as the amsa svara or the resting note and the two performers developed by turns a beautifully embroidered pattern of the raga. Noticing that Krishnayyar was playing with unusual enthusiasm, Sastrigal remarked in ecstasy: "The region of prati madhyama is yours, indisputably". Such was the excellence of Krishnayyar's violin play. Whenever Krishnayyar provided the violin accompaniment to Sarabha Sastrigal, who was veritably the Sangita Chakravarti (musical emperor) of his time, the latter had to exert himself to maintain his own against the torrential music of his accompanist-friend.

3. Even without a mridangam accompaniment, Krishnayyar could easily please audiences.

Once on the occasion of the birth-day festivities of H.H. the Maharaja of Pudukkottai, Krishnayyar was invited to give a solo Violin recital. The performance was announced to commence at 9 p. m. in the Hall of the Maharaja's College. The Regent Saheb as well as the elite of the place had come to listen to the performance. Krishnayyar arrived in time but Dakshinamurti Pillai who had been engaged to provide the mridangam accompaniment did not turn up. Without the least concern, Krishnayyar tuned the Tambura and the Violin and straightaway began his performance at the announced time. After a few kritis, he took up Sankarabharana raga for detailed exposition. The alapana was followed by the pallavi "*Mahima teliya tarama*". He concentrated on the bass part and also sang while playing it. His deep sonorous voice blended wonderfully with the rich and reverberant tone of the fourth (mandara) string of the violin. (It is customary for vainikas and solo violinists to give a vocal rendering of the pallavi in order to enable the

audiences to appreciate its setting more fully). The audience listened in pin-drop silence. Drunk with the nectar of sweet melody, they literally forgot themselves and felt as if they had been transported to regions of aesthetic bliss. Krishnayyar thus established that day, that he could give a splendid performance even without the aid of a mridangam.

4. Once Ramnad Srinivasa Ayyangar performed in Triplicane, Madras to the violin accompaniment of Tirukkodikaval Krishnayyar. After the concert was over, Krishnayyar returned to the house of his host in Kachchaleeswarar Agraharam in George Town. Srinivasa Ayyangar said to Krishnayyar that he preferred to spend the night in the house of his friend in Triplicane. But he knew that Krishnayyar would practise the violin early morning the next day. He decided within his mind to go to Kachchaleeswara Agraharam, unnoticed, sleep in the pial of another house and listen to Krishnayyar's practice.

Accordingly after his night meal, with a thick coating of sandal paste over his body, he went to Kachchaleeswara Agraharam at about 11 p.m. and slept in the pial of the house adjacent to the one where Krishnayyar was staying. The violinist as usual got up at 3 a. m. and began his practice. He played Varali raga that morning. His creative talents found full vent at that time. After Krishnayyar began his practice in the drawing room, Srinivasa Ayyangar came and sat on the pial of that house and was feasting his ears with the delightful music. At about 5 a.m. Krishnayyar came out to answer his calls of nature and was surprised to find Poochchi Ayyangar. "How do you happen to be here just at this time" queried Krishnayyar. Ayyangar replied "Sir, I knew that you would carry on your practice and wanted to profit by it. I came last night at about 11 p.m.

to this place.” (In the presence of musicians, Krishnayyar practised only the familiar pieces and ragas and would not attempt rare ragas and creative flights in unexplored regions. It is for this reason that Poochchi Ayyangar came without giving him prior intimation.)

5. Krishnayyar was held in great esteem by prominent officials of Madras of the time like Sir S. Subrahmanya Ayyar, Chief Justice of Madras High Court. When Lord Curzon was Governor of Madras, a prominent violinist from the west visited the city. The Governor suggested that some of the prominent violinists of South India may be invited to hear the concert of the Western musician. Krishnayyar was one of the invitees. He listened to this concert. He was struck with the remarkable bow technique, and the double stops and flageolet notes that the occidental violinist played. The Governor enquired, whether any Indian violinist can play like him. Krishnayyar promised to do so and asked for time. Returning home, he sat at the violin carefully and assiduously practised all the techniques exhibited by the performer from the West. He practised playing suddha svaras in the fifth and sixth degrees of speed. On the appointed day, he simply thrilled the Governor, the Western violinist and the elite of Madras by his play. He played in such a manner as to give the impression, that he was veritably playing a piece composed for the violin, by an occidental composer. At the end of his play, he was asked for the score of his music. He had to reveal that what all he played was his own improvisation.

6. When he was giving a solo violin performance in Triplicane, Madras in the year 1904, the sad news of the passing away of Sarabha Sastrigal was communicated to him. He felt shocked at the news. He stopped the performance for a while and sobbed and remarked “When Maha Vaithi

(Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar) passed away, I lost my right hand. With the passing away of Sarabhan, (Sarabha Sastri) I have lost even my left hand. What is it that I am going to play hereafter?" He felt that there were no vidwans left to give him sufficient work in concerts. As an accompanist to Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar, his powers at bowing were fully taxed since he had to play kalpana svaras at electric speed. In the concerts of Sarabha Sastri, his left hand technique was fully taxed.

7. Singers in general are anxious to have Violinists and Mridangam players of top rank as accompanists. Such accompaniments though result in their being dwarfed, still not only add to their prestige, but, incidentally, supply the deficiencies, if any, in their performances and make the concerts enjoyable.

Early in this century, a certain musician from the Kerala was scheduled for a performance at a marriage party and the great Violinist Tirukkodikaval Krishnayyar was engaged for the occasion. The violinist was not told beforehand whom he was to accompany. A few minutes before the commencement hour of the concert, Tirukkodikaval Krishnayyar came to the marriage pandal, only to be greeted by this Vidwan from Kerala. The concert began and Krishnayyar, out of loyalty to the laws of kachcheri dharma, played well. The trouble about the singer was that he indulged in too much of rhythmic gymnastics and musical acrobatics and many a time sacrificed melody and sweetness for this purpose.

The concert came to a close and the singer thanked the violinist and expressed his appreciation of his performance in the following terms :—

“தாங்கள் இன்றையதினம் கான வருஷம் வருஷிச்சுட்டயள்” (Translation) You have today (literally) *rained* music.

Immediately came the stinging reply from Krishnayyar :

“தாங்களும் இன்றையதினம் சிலா வருஷம் வருஷிச்சுட்டயள்”; (Translation) You have also today (literally) *rained* stones (and not music).

8. Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy, the famous art critic was once in Madras and heard a solo violin recital of Tirukkodikaval Krishnayyar. He was fascinated beyond measure by his music. Towards the close of the performance, he was requested to say a few words by way of appreciation of the great musician's talents. Instead of speaking, he simply blurted out in a low tone some note and asked Krishnayyar what the svara of that note was. (Truly an impertinent question to be put to an artist of Krishnayyar's eminence.) Krishnayyar was provoked. He straightaway took the violin and without even a moment's pause and without even feeling his way on the finger-board, placed his fingers at the correct position, took the bow and played the note saying “Here is your note! Sir”. The entire audience was filled with amazement, since the note rendered by the Art critic had no bearing on any of the known ragas. Dr. Coomaraswamy said to Krishnayyar “Sir, please do not feel insulted at my question. It is only to prove your extraordinary sense of svarajnanam that I gave this test”. He then made a nice speech eulogising the talents and achievements of Krishnayyar in Violin play.

Koneri Rajapuram Vaidyanatha Ayyar himself said that he owed much of his knowledge of music to having listened to Tirukkodikaval Krishnayyar. When Vaidyanatha Ayyar and Krishnayyar travelled together in train the latter was requested to play the violin. Vaidyanatha Ayyar and other Vidwans considerably profited from such performances.



Mridangam Narayanaswami Appa

13. MRIDANGAM NARAYANASWAMI APPA

The musical culture of a country is reflected in the high status accorded by it to instrumental music. Vadya sangita is given an honoured place in the scheme of life of the nation in India. Concert instruments like the Veena, Gotuvadyam, Flute, Nagaswaram and Mridangam have developed a high degree of technique in play. Exercises to acquire deftness in fingering, ornamental execution, speed in play and easy manipulation of graces have been developed. It is an aesthetic experience to watch the artistic movements of fingers of a top-ranking Vainika or a Mridangam player. Proficiency in instrumental music is obtained by hard and strenuous practice extending over many years.

The rhythmical harmony provided by the mridangam player in India is a thing unknown in the music of the west. (The advanced type of Jazz music of the west owes its popularity to the wild improvisations made in the sphere of rhythm). The mridangam is the instrument *par excellence* for depicting the various aspects and beauties of rhythm. If play in mridangam has become a highly refined, delicate and complicated art, it is not to a small extent due to the efforts of gifted performers like Narayanaswami Appa. Narayanaswami Appa along with his contemporaries, Tukaram and Das Swami constitute the *Mridangam trio* of whom the world of Karnatic music is justly proud.

Early life and Training

He belonged to the family of the *Appas*, one of the ancient Mahratta Kshatriya families. The members of the

Appa family held high and responsible positions during the reign of the Mahratta rulers of Tanjore.

Narayanaswami Appa was born in Tanjore. He started his career as a copyist in state service. Later he learnt the art of mridangam play from Sivaswami Appa, a leading performer of the time. He soon discovered that he had a special aptitude for the art, and worked at the instrument with assiduity and care. He soon acquired mastery in the art and rose in the profession. He stayed in the Marutiswamy Mutt at Mannargudi and carried on his practices. Tradition has it that Lord Maruti appeared to him in dream and asked him to conduct Saturday Bhajanas. He carried out the divine injunction faithfully.

Saturday bhajanas

Appa was a great devotee of Sri Rama. On Saturdays he performed bhajanas. He sang devotional songs providing rhythmical accompaniment on the mridangam himself. Musicians and devotees thronged to his house on those occasions. Endowed with a good, rich and sonorous voice, he sang to faultless sruti and laya. His two disciples, Yoganath and Swaminath played on two tamburas on the occasion. One Tambura was tuned in the normal manner i. e. mandra panchama, sarani, anusarani (middle octave shadja) and mandram (mandra shadja). The other Tambura which was smaller in size was the panchama sruti tambura. The fourth string in this smaller tambura was tuned to madhya shadja and the two middle strings were tuned to madhya sthayi panchama. The other string was tuned to mandra Panchama. Thus whereas one tambura had one panchama and three shadjas, the other tambura had one shadja and three panchamas. The cumulative effect of the

drone notes of the two tamburas was delightful and pleasing. The svayambhu svaras or harmonics that emanated from the two tamburas blended well and provided an inviting melodic background. In fact, the features of an ideal gana expounded by Tyagaraja in his kriti in Sriranjani raga, *Sogasuga mridanga talamu* were faithfully reflected in the music of the Saturday bhajanas of Narayanaswamy Appa. Everyone felt chastened by the *Susvara gana*. The spiritual rapture that the listeners felt, was a rare experience.

His professional career

He was the sthala vidvan of Setubhava Swamy Mutt. When the great Kirtanacharya from Gwalior, Morgaumkar Ramachandra Bava came to Tanjore along with his son Vishnu Bava and conducted Chaturmasya kirtan, Narayanaswamy Appa accompanied him on the mridangam and considerably developed his art.

For the purpose of his profession, he kept in readiness about eight mridangams tuned to the various pitches of the performers who invited him to accompany. The pitches of these mridangams ranged from 2 to 6 in pitch. He knew the pitches of the various performers. In the case of new performers, he ascertained the pitch beforehand. When he had to accompany a performer, he took to the concert hall the particular mridangam whose pitch agreed with the pitch of the performer. The tambura and the violin were tuned in the concert hall to the drone note provided by Appa's mridangam. This is a proof of the great confidence that all the top-ranking performers had in Appa's sense of sruti. If after going to the concert hall, the vidvan complained that his voice was a bit hoarse that day and preferred to sing a semitone lower, Appa sent his disciple to go to his residence and bring the mridangam tuned to that lower pitch.

How he maintained his Mridangam

He was never known to have tuned a mridangam in the concert hall by striking with a hammer or stone the knots along the periphery part of the drum-head. When a mridangam was made afresh and brought to him, he would play upon it for sometime and test the absolute correctness of the mittu, chapu and toppi nadam. If satisfied, he labelled it as concert-worthy and noted the pitch upon it. Even if there was the slightest difference, he would send back the mridangam for being reconditioned and brought. He realised from experience that when a correctly made mridangam was brought by the instrument maker, the peripheral parts were subject to equal pull or tension and the instrument in consequence gave a rich, beautiful, full and resonant tone. When the rim was struck at one point, the position of the centrum got disturbed and this resulted in the loss to some extent of the tonal excellence and the responsive character of the instrument.

He also realised that the finger tips had a share in the production of the tone. He avoided touching hard materials. For example, when he had to enter a railway carriage, he would not touch the door lintel. He asked his disciples to open the door and he got into the carriage.

His art

His play on mridangam was superb and was characterised by a delicate touch. His play was melodious and pleasant to hear. Even the fastest strokes were characterised by clearness. He was a loyal accompanist and strove to the best of his ability to enrich the music of his principal. The rhythmical commentary and embellishment provided by this gifted performer made the audience realise the beauty

of the music of the principal to a greater degree. All the top-ranking artistes of the time thought it an honour and privilege to have Appa as the mridangam accompanist. He was equally at home whether he accompanied a Singer, Vainika, Flutist or Jalatarangam performer. Amongst the top-ranking artists whom he accompanied on the mridangam may be mentioned Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar, Patnam Subrahmanya Ayyar, Sarabha Sastrigal, Veena Seshanna, Todi Sundara Rao, Jalatarangam Venkoba Rao, Saranda Naick and Tanjore Krishna Bagavathar (Kalakshepam). His play reminded everyone of the delicate parans of his elder contemporary, Dolak Nannumia.

Appa, was perfectly at home with the complicated jatis or rhythmical phrase-patterns that were the monopoly of adepts in Bharata Sastra. The bewildering sequences heard in their Konugol recitals were all reproduced by him with perfect ease and grace. He would prepare the left head of the drum with great care and apply just the quantity of the paste required at the centre. Not even a particle of this paste would come off during his play. The left head gave the exact lower octave note of the right head. The combined tone that emanated from his simultaneous strokes on both the heads, virtually gave the impression of *Pranava Nada*. He was singularly free from unseemly mannerisms. The sweating movements of the limbs noticed in the case of many mridangam players were conspicuous by their absence. His sitting posture while playing was graceful. In fact, only the movements of his fingers revealed to an onlooker that he was playing the drum. He easily steadied himself in the tempo adopted by the principal musician whom he was accompanying and played three Kalas (double and quadruple speeds) with remarkable clearness and accuracy.

The instrument in his hands pulsed always with a delightful and melodious tone. Even when he manipulated *parans* (sequences of rhythmic phrase patterns of very quick tempo) the fine tone of the instrument was pleasingly patent all the time.

He had an attractive personality and commanded respect from one and all. He was regular in his habits and led a pure life. He drank the water from the Sivagangai tirtham in Tanjore. When he accepted mofussil engagements, he invariably made arrangements for the supply to him of this water before starting on the journey.

14. TIRUMARUGAL NATESA PILLAI

Nagasvaram is one of the important concert instruments of South India. It is ideally suited for performing the highest type of classical music. An elaborate technique of play has been developed. The tradition of expounding a raga for hours together at a stretch is still being kept alive by performers on the Nagasvaram. The District of Tanjore which has been an important seat of musical culture for over three centuries has also produced eminent performers on this instrument. Amongst them, Tirumarugal Natesa Pillai occupies an honoured place. He was a contemporary of the famous flutist Sarabha Sastrigal.

Tirumarugal in Tanjore District has a famous shrine. The Deity of the place has been sung by great devotees. Born in a place associated with spiritual environments and musical traditions, and born in a family of Nagasvaram players, Natesa Pillai soon mastered the art of playing on Nagasvaram and attained a high degree of proficiency in it. He dived deep into the eternal springs of nada and unravelled many of its mysteries. Words can hardly describe the beauty of his play. The excellence of his play literally made even inanimate objects respond. When he developed a raga and presented the beauties of its several parts, the listeners got the impression that the particular *Raga Devata* stood before them in full stature and shone in all the resplendent glory and charm. His music touched the strings of one's heart.

His expositions of the ragas, Kanada, Athana, and Sahana were without a parallel. Once during the

Peyalwar Utsavam in Chennakesava Perumal temple in Madras, both Sempanarkovil Ramaswamy and Tirumarugal Natesan were invited to perform together. In appreciation of their marvellous performances, both were honoured with the presentation of golden nagasvarams.

Ambalavana Desikar, the head of the Tiruvaduturai Mutt of the time had a great love and regard for Natesan's music. Respect to elders was an inborn trait in Natesan. He was a great devotee. He ascended the ladder of fame early in his life. It is a great pity that the cruel hand of Death snatched him away when he was barely 28 years of age.

Anecdotes

1. Once, the leading residents of Karaikkudi arranged a joint concert of Tirumarugal Natesan and Mannargudy Chinna Pakkiri, another brilliant performer of the time on the Nagasvaram. The latter started playing the Kiravani raga. His alapana was thorough, exhaustive and fully comprehensive of all the beauties of the raga. It appeared as if he had painted the picture of Kiravani in all its fulness, leaving not even a spot untouched. The lightning speed with which the glittering musical phrases were literally showered on the vast assembly of scholars and rasikas in the closing stages of the alapana, gave the impression that nothing was practically left for Natesan in this raga. When Natesan's turn came, he started the raga undaunted and in perfect composure. He rose equal to the occasion. His creative faculty began to glow with fresh vigour. The phrases that flowed from his instrument were as variegated as they were full of melody. The entire audience fell into raptures. Chinna Pakkiri himself was touched by his alapana and

praised the fascinating style of his play. Subsequently, the two performers took up a pallavi and gave a marvellous exposition of it by turns. At the conclusion of the performance, both were lustily cheered. They were dubbed as the *two eyes* of the instrument Nagasvara—Natesan being the right eye and Pakkiri being the left eye. Both were equally honoured.

2. In Konapet, a place in Pudukottai, Natesa Pillai was engaged to perform on all the four days of a marriage in Lakshmanan Chettiar's house. Sarabha Sastrigal was also invited to perform. On the day of his flute performance, Sastrigal expounded the raga Kambhoji elaborately and splendidly and followed it up with the exposition of a fine Pallavi in that raga. There is a healthy tradition that the Nagaswaram performer on such occasions should take up the same raga that was expounded in the evening concert and follow it up. Natesan took up Kambhoji and rendered it as melodiously as Sastrigal rendered it on the flute. Many got the impression that Sastrigal himself was playing on the flute although all the while they were listening to the nagaswaram of Natesan. Towards the close of the performance, Sarabha Sastrigal complimented Natesan by saying that he was an "*Eka santa grahi*" i. e., one who mastered the intricacies at the very first hearing.

Section III. Pioneer Kathakas

15. TANJORE KRISHNA BHAGAVATAR (1847—1903)

If the art of *Katha Kalakshepam* reached a high level of excellence in the immediate past it was due principally to the pioneering efforts of Tanjore Krishna Bhagavatar. Rightly has he been called the *Father of modern Kalakshepam in South India*. *Katha Kalakshepam* corresponds to the *Kirtan* of North India.

Early life and Training

Krishna Bhagavatar evinced an aptitude for music even in his teens. He came in contact with eminent musicians of his time. Through the help of some of them he acquired proficiency in playing the *Violin*, *Swaragat* and *Mridangam*. In order to quench his desire to learn the sterling compositions of the great saint, Sri Tyagaraja, he went to Tillasthanam (Tiruneyttanam), a village near Tiruvaiyar (Tiruvadi) in Tanjore District. Sitting at the feet of Tillasthanam Rama Iyengar, one of the prominent disciples of Sri Tyagaraja, he learnt the saint's compositions in the correct style. In Tanjore itself, he heard *kathas* from a number of Bhagavatars. He soon became familiar with the northern and southern styles of expositions. In his *kathas*, he attempted a harmonious blending of the best in the two styles. Besides scholarship in Sanskrit, he acquired proficiency in Marathi, Telugu, Tamil, Hindusthani and other languages.



Tanjore Krishna Bhagavata

His Performances

The success of his *kalakshepams* was principally due to the fact that they were fully saturated with the elements of *bhava* and *rasa*. While listening to his *kathas*, the audience literally got the impression that the story narrated was actually taking place before them. That was the reason why scholars and lay persons alike attended his *kathas* with great interest.

His intimate knowledge of Bharata Sastra was another factor that contributed to the excellence of his performances. During the course of a *katha* he would take advantage of an apt situation and exhibit his skill in *natana* (dance) by dancing to all the fine, complicated *jatis* in the running time - measure.

Personality

Endowed with a beautiful, attractive and commanding personality, he proved himself an ideal person for the task. *Abhinayas* from such a gifted personality naturally drew approbation even from scholarly persons. Although he was not gifted with a highly captivating voice, his sparkling tonal touches and polished renderings of pieces brought on him encomiums from even brilliant contemporaries like Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar. The remarkable *Sruti suddha* of Krishna Bhagavata's music attracted the attention of one and all. The accuracy of *Sruti* was patent right through his performances. The cymbals (*talam*) that he used gave a note which coincided with his own tonic note or with one of its harmonics. Even the notes emanating from the *Gejjai* (ankle bells) that he wore, bore a similar relationship. The cumulative effect of these autophonic instruments and his own vocal music contributed in a high degree to the enjoy-

ment of his performances. Leading personages of the day invited him to give *kalakshepams*. He was profusely honoured everywhere. Special mention may be made of the honour bestowed upon him by Ramachandra Maharaja of Pudukkottai, a scholar in many languages. Krishna Bhagavatar and Vishnu Bava were invited by the Maharaja to perform *kalakshepams* in his presence by turns several times. It was the good fortune of Krishna Bhagavatar to have had Tanjore Panchapakesa Bhagavatar and Marudappa as his accompanying vocalists. When these three sang together, the combined melodic stream of their voices produced a delightful effect.

It was customary for Krishna Bhagavatar to perform during the Ayyaval Utsavam at Tiruvisanalloor (Tanjore District). His performances on such occasions drew praise from *Sangita vidvans* and scholars in Sanskrit alike. Even the veteran scholar Mahamahopadhyaya Ramasubba Sastri-gal took delight in attending his *kalakshepams*. The balanced construction of the sentences that were heard during his discourses was an alluring feature. It may be safely asserted that no one got satiated by listening to his *kalakshepams* even on the same theme a number of times. The desire to listen to him again and again was generated every time a person listened to his marvellous performance.

Rendering of Nandanar Charitram

Gopalakrishna Bharati is the author of the well-known Tamil opera, *Nandanar Charitram*. There is not a single person in the whole of Tamil Nad who cannot sing or hum some of the captivating melodies of this opera. The opera is so well conceived that it can be produced on the stage as well as used in the form of a *kalakshepam* with equal

effect. Gopalakrishna Bharati himself gave the *Nandanar Charitram* as a *kalakshepam* for three days, dividing the story into three parts. Gopalakrishna Bharati was a *naishtika brahmachari* and lived in solitude for about 15 years towards the close of his life i.e., during the eighties and nineties of the last century. Krishna Bhagavatar studied the *Nandanar Charitram* well and gave it as a *kalakshepam*. His polished renderings of the songs in the play, his vivid exposition of the philosophy underlying some of the songs, the sterling portrayal of the various *rasas* of the play through appropriate discourses, all earned for him great name and fame. *Nandanar Charitram* soon became the most favoured theme for his *kalakshepams*.

Anecdotes

1. Once in Mannargudi the veteran scholar Parittiyur Krishna Sastrigal was giving a series of discourses on Valmiki Ramayana. This scholar earned the high praise of being called an Amsa of Valmiki. Krishna Bhagavatar was also invited to Mannargudi at that time. On the day of his *katha*, Parittiyur Krishna Sastrigal was requested to take the chair. At the request of those assembled, the Bhagavatar chose as the theme of his discourse *Sita Kalyanam*. The performance was, as usual, a grand success. The learned *Ramayana* scholar was so deeply moved by the splendid performance of the Bhagavatar that towards the close he involuntarily exclaimed, "Oh, Bhagavatar! I am accustomed to give discourses on *Sita Kalyanam*; but you by your matchless performance have made us feel that we were actually witnessing the marriage of Rama and Sita in Mithila."

This is sufficient to prove the remarkably appealing character of Krishna Bhagavathar's *kalakshepams*.

2. Once Vedanayakam Pillai, a disciple of Gopalakrishna Bharati, had an occasion to witness *Nandanar Charitram* being performed by Krishna Bhagavatar. He was remarkably impressed with the performance of the Bhagavatar. When Gopalakrishna Bharati came back from his seclusion, Mr. Pillai took him one day to a performance of *Nandanar Charitram* by Krishna Bhagavatar. Mr. Pillai took care to seat Gopalakrishna Bharati at a distance and he himself sat in front of the Bhagavatar. Krishna Bhagavatar had not seen Gopalakrishna Bharati before, although he knew Vedanayakam Pillai well. At the end of the performance, Vedanayakam Pillai brought Gopalakrishna Bharati to Krishna Bhagavatar and introduced him as the author of the *Nandanar Charitram*. Krishna Bhagavatar was taken aback. He immediately prostrated before Gopalakrishna Bharati and requested him to bless him. Afterwards he took to task Mr. Pillai for not having introduced him to Bharati at the very commencement of the performance. He asserted that Bharati should have been given a seat of honour and that he should have started his performance with his formal blessings.

Gopalakrishna Bharati said, "Well, Sir! I know I am the author of *Nandanar Charitram*. But the story and discourses have assumed a special lustre and charm in your hands. You have given a fresh life to my humble work." So saying, he blessed him.

Ramnad Srinivasa Ayyangar

Date of Birth : 10-9-1867 (27th Avani, Prabava Year)

Date of Death : 20-7-1919 (13th Adi, Siddarti Year)

உ
ஸ்ரீ ராமநாத சஹாயம்

பிரம்மஸ்ரீ வையை மஹாவித்வான்

இ ராம சு வா மி ஜ ய ர வ ர் க ட் கு

நமது திராவிட பாடையிலதி
பாண்டித்தியமும் சங்கீதசா
ஹித்தியங்களி லதிகத்திறமை
யுமுள்ள தங்கட்கு ஜெயவரு
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பட்டங்களு மளித்துத் தங்களை
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டிதருள் திராவிட சபையோருக்
கக்கிராசனாதிபதியாகவும் நியமித்தி
ருப்பதை இச்சந்நதின் மூலம் தெரி
விக்கலானோம்.

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முகவையம்பதி }

(Sd.) M. BHASKARA SETUPATI.

(Sd.) விஜயரகுநாத-பாஸ்கர சேதுபதி.

To

**Brahmasri Vaiyai (i. e. Vaiyacheri)
Maha Vidwan Ramaswamy Ayyar**

Deeply learned in our Dravida bhasha (Tamil)
and highly proficient in Sangita and Sahitya;

On the occasion of the Maha Navaratri
Mahotsava of this year, Jaya ;

Before this Assembly convened in the Maha
Sannidanam of our ancestral, Sri Galandara Peetha ;

We hereby make known that

The titles of

MONAICHCHINGAM & SAHITYAPPULI

are conferred upon you.

You are also appointed President of the Dravida
Sabha section of the Court Pandits of the Setu
Samasthanam.

Dated the 7th of the month
Tula, Jaya year.
(Monday 22nd October 1894)
Mugavaiyambadi,
(i. e. Ramnad)

Sd. M. Bhaskara Setupati
(In English)

Sd. Vijayaraghunatha Bhaskara
Setupati
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